

"YE SONS OF MARS": BRITISH REPRESENTATIONS OF THE SUDAN  
CAMPAIGN IN PRINT CULTURE, 1884-1899

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by

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## ABSTRACT

“Ye Sons of Mars”: British Representations of the Sudan Campaign in Print

Culture, 1884-1899

Crystal Eunique Smith

From 1884 to 1885 the British were first engaged with the Mahdist forces of Sudan in an effort to first rescue the inhabitants of Khartoum, and later to rescue the rescuer Charles “Chinese” Gordon. The affair played out both in Parliament and the newspapers as journalists became the cheerleaders for Empire. My thesis focuses on Britain’s 1884-1890 Sudan Campaign through print culture using political debates, journalism, literature, memoirs, and art. I show how the activism of the press and the romanticism of the larger media reinforced ideas about imperialism and the British role within the Empire at large.

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## CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

YE sons of Mars, come join with me,  
And sing in praise of Sir Herbert Stewart's little army,  
That made ten thousand Arabs flee  
At the charge of the bayonet at Abu Klea.  
"The Battle of Abu Klea," William Topaz McGonagall

Everyone here praises loudly the admirable manner in which the affair was conducted by General Stewart, who for his part speaks in the highest terms of the conduct of all ranks. Our loss was severe but our success was complete.  
The Times, 22nd January 1885

By the start of January 1885, General Gordon's defense of Khartoum was running out of time. The relief column commanded by Lord Wolseley had left from Wadi Haifa in August, but down on the banks of the Nile they had only progressed as far as Korti, 250 kilometers south of Khartoum. In desperation, Wolseley formed a fifteen thousand man camel corps under the command of General Sir Herbert Stewart. On the 16th of January, Stewart's column engaged with a large party of Mahdist at the oasis of Abu Klea. Meeting fierce fighting, a primitive machine gun- the Gardner gun- was manned by sailors who proceeded to open fire on the Mahdi's forces. By the end of the fierce fighting seventy-four British were dead, with another ninety-four wounded. However, the Mahdists lost around eleven thousand with countless more injured, victims of the tremendous fire power of the British. In the words of Hilarie Belloc: "we have got the



Maxim gun and they have not." Of course, the Maxim gun was not used at Abu Klea, but it would be the Emin Pasha Expedition in Equatoria, a colonial adventure made necessary by the events in the Egyptian Sudan.

From 1884 to 1885 the British were initially engaged with the Mahdist forces of Sudan in an effort to rescue the inhabitants of Khartoum, then later to rescue the rescuer Charles "Chinese" Gordon. The events played out in Parliament, the newspapers, in novels, and art. The Sudan was the battleground of British ideologies surrounding Big and Little England, the role of Imperialism, and Britain's shrinking power on the world stage. The defeat in 1885 and subsequent return in the 1890s fed the romantic Imperial desires of writers of New Journalism, which in turn would inspire the fiction writers of adventure novels and romances. Industrial machines like the Maxim gun became the symbol of British Imperialism and perceived power.

General Charles "Chinese" Gordon (1833-1885) was a career officer and colonial administrator.<sup>1</sup> The son of an officer, having joined the army at sixteen, and becoming by thirty a highly successful captain in the Royal Engineers, Gordon went on to win an international reputation as a brilliant commander of irregular forces in the service of the Chinese emperor during the mid-1860s. His success garnered attention from the British press, which gave him the nickname of "Chinese" Gordon.<sup>2</sup> Thereafter, Gordon had held

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<sup>1</sup>C. Brad Fraught, *Gordon: Victorian Hero*, (Washington, D.C.: Potomac Books, 2008), 1.

<sup>2</sup> Fraught, 29; In 1860 Gordon was a volunteer officer to assist Chinese officials in putting down the Taiping Rebellion. Led by Hong Xiuquan who proclaimed himself to be the brother of Jesus Christ, Xiuquan and his followers (the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom) wanted the Chinese people converted their interpretation of Christianity. These rebels would ultimately be defeated by the Qing military force the "Ever Victorious Army," led by Gordon. During this time Gordon led his men to thirty-three battles, all resulting in victory.

a number of commands, including the Governorship of Equatoria, the southernmost province of the Sudan, between 1874 and 1879, as well as posts in India, China (once more), Ireland, Mauritius, and the Cape.<sup>3</sup> He had also spent a year in Palestine investigating the sites of the Holy Places<sup>4</sup>. However, it would be his return to the Sudan that would cement Gordon as a martyr of the British Empire.

In 1873 the British had assumed responsibility over Egypt in order to protect their interests in the Suez Canal and ensure repayment of loans to the Egyptian government.<sup>5</sup> Gordon was appointed governor of Sudan and he immediately intensified the anti-slavery campaign started by the Egyptian ruler Muhammed Ali a decade earlier.<sup>6</sup> Sudanese Arab leaders, however, saw British efforts as a European Christian attempt to undermine Muslim Arab dominance in the region. On June 29, 1881, a Sudanese Islamic cleric, Muhammad Ahmad, proclaimed himself the Mahdi. Playing into decades of disenchantment over Egyptian rule and new resentment against the British, Ahmad immediately transformed an incipient political movement into a fundamentally religious one. <sup>7</sup>Urging jihad or “holy war” against imperial Egypt, Ahmad formed an army.

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 43, 46, 69, 58-59.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 72.

<sup>5</sup> John Darwin, *After Tamerlane: The Rise and Fall of Global Empires, 1400-2000*, (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2008), 308.

<sup>6</sup> Fraught, 45.

<sup>7</sup> Darwin, 344.

By 1882 the Mahdist Army had taken complete control over the area surrounding Khartoum.<sup>8</sup> Then in 1883, a joint British-Egyptian military expedition under the command of British Colonel William Hicks launched a counterattack against the Mahdists. Hicks was soon killed and the British decided to evacuate the Sudan. Gordon was sent in 1884 to evacuate the capital of Khartoum. Fighting continued however and the British-Egyptian forces which defended Khartoum in a long siege were finally overrun on January 28, 1885.<sup>9</sup> Virtually the entire garrison was killed. Gordon was beheaded during the attack.

In June 1885 Ahmad, the self-proclaimed Mahdi, died.<sup>10</sup> As a result the Mahdist movement quickly dissolved as infighting broke out among rival claimants to leadership. Hoping to capitalize on internal strife, the British returned to the Sudan in 1896 with Horatio Kitchener as commander of another Anglo-Egyptian army. In the final battle of the war on September 2, 1898 at Karari, 11,000 Mahdists were killed and 16,000 were wounded.<sup>11</sup> Ahmad's successor called the Khalifa fled after his forces were overrun. In November of 1899 he was found and killed, officially ending the Mahdist state.<sup>12</sup>

In the larger context of scholarship regarding the British Empire, the Sudan Campaign has been overlooked in academic history as opposed to popular histories (especially in the 1970s). What the Sudan Campaign has been is an example for

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Harold E. Raugh, *The Victorians at War, 1815-1914: An Encyclopedia of British Military History*, (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2004), 37.

<sup>11</sup> Raugh, 192.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

Imperialist and Imperial apologists of the romance of the British stiff upper lip or stoicism in the face of adversity, especially in the last stand of General Gordon. His death was immortalized by Charlton Heston in the film *Khartoum* and has been the subject of numerous biographies.

However, the events at Khartoum and in the subsequent Sudan Campaign were part of Britain's larger Imperial project and spheres of influence in Africa. But the Empire did not just exist in the periphery, it also affected the everyday life of Britons back in the home nation. The economic engine of the Empire produced goods made possible by the resources of the Empire. In turn, advertisements then marketed these goods using the exploits and spoils of Imperial adventures. These adventurers in turn became the heroes of literature. Journalists as special correspondents made themselves heroes in their dispatches from the periphery. Politicians then sanctioned these exploits by adding new colonies and "protectorates" into the fold.

This thesis argues that by looking at the example of representations of the Sudan Campaign in print culture, we can observe that the press was not only aware of the empire, but deeply invested in imperial matters. In this aim, political debates, journalism, literature, and memoirs will be used. Ultimately the British public was also the Imperial public, and this public influenced and was influenced by Imperial activity. The British Empire could not have been as powerful and lasting unless civil society bought into the concept of Britain as an Empire.

As events in the Empire captured the imagination of the British press at home, books portraying Imperial military campaigns and their heroes, on the general history of Africa and their peoples, adventure narratives of popular figures, and biographies of heroes like Gordon or the Emin Pasha were produced. For the purposes of this project I will be focusing of those print materials released first in the period between 1884 and 1899 as they would have been concurrent with both events in question and reflect the mood surrounding them in the wider print culture.

The role of the press is an important aspect of Jürgen Habermas's concept of the Public Sphere. For Habermas, the public there is a distinct space from one's home life, the church, and the government. It is instead a space for people to gather and discuss ideas. Newspapers were a way to disseminate these ideas to a wider audience. However, as Nancy Fraser points out, this was a bourgeois public sphere, space not for the masses but for the educated elite.<sup>13</sup> The democratization of access to print opened the door to the mass production of the press. This mass production allowed the press industry to manipulate public opinion.<sup>14</sup>

Thus, this thesis takes the approach that print culture, fueled by an activist press and romanticized media, manipulated public opinion. Personal opinions were consumed within the private sphere. These private personal opinions were then co-opted by journalists like Stead to construct a public opinion that put pressure on politicians. Mark

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<sup>13</sup> Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig Calhoun, (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1992), 112.

<sup>14</sup> Fraser, 113.

Hampton notes that as journalism shifted from a source “of communication to one of commerce” the mass audience as consumer became a driving force of the media.<sup>15</sup> The emergence of New Journalism allowed for the commodification of journalism indoctrinating fixed opinions to be bought by the larger public.

In the 1880s New Journalism emerged with the special correspondent taking center stage. Politicians would quote their words on the floor of the parliament and writers would make the correspondents the protagonists of their novels. The most famous example would be that of Winston Churchill who would pen *The River War* in 1898 as a young cavalry officer and correspondent for the *Morning Post*. W.T. Stead of the *Pall Mall Gazette* and his interview with Charles Gordon is of major importance to this thesis as it was his interview with Stead that started the popular movement to send Gordon to Khartoum. The conservative *Spectator*, the liberal *Times*, along with other regional newspapers will be used to see how the Sudan Campaign was reported on in the press and to discern any ideological views of Britain’s role there.

Literature in nineteenth century Britain was often topical and would comment on current events and issues of importance. However, romantic novels and poems of escapism became popular with the public. Writers such as Rudyard Kipling depicted the war and its participants as adventures and thrill seekers. Kipling’s *The Light that Failed* and his poem “Fuzzy-Wuzzy” depicts soldiers and war correspondents experiences in the

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<sup>15</sup> Mark Hampton, “Repeating the Public Sphere: The New Journalism and Its Historians, in *Transatlantic Print Culture, 1880-1940: Emerging Media, Emerging Modernisms*, eds. Ann Ardis and Patrick Collier, (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008), 53.

Sudan. Hilarie Belloc's epic poem *The Modern Traveller* as well as Henry Newbolt's "Vitaï Lampada" examine the ideological aspects of the Empire in Africa.

Reading newspapers and other forms of the popular press as source material on attitudes is, of course, problematic. Indeed, one of the key challenges any historian confronts is tracing attitudes through written records. Memoirs, diaries, and letters are of course vital sources in this respect, but such sources may provide only an incomplete account of a person's personal reflections and feelings. The challenge becomes even greater when attempting to ascertain the consciousness of a group of people. This is especially true when dealing with public opinions on a national level, where the so-called "national consciousness" was often splintered by political, social, cultural, historical, geographical, and economic influences into a multitude of perspectives.

Nonetheless, as Michael de Nie has noted, the nineteenth-century British press can appropriately be seen as a reflection and product of the public's awareness and engagement in the world around it. In addition the press, in particular the local press, were for many the primary source of news and served effectively to connect the public to the societal and governmental issues of the day.<sup>16</sup> As Lord Lytton noted in 1833:

Large classes of men entertain certain views on matters of policy, trade or morals. A newspaper supports itself by addressing these classes; it brings to light all the knowledge requisite to enforce or illustrate the view of its supporters; it embodies also the prejudice, the passion and the sectarian bigotry that belong to one body of men engaged in active opposition to one another. It is, therefore, the organ of

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<sup>16</sup> Michael de Nie, *The Eternal Paddy: Irish Identity and the British Press, 1798-1882* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004), 28-30.

opinion; expressing at once the truths, the errors, the good, and the bad of the prevalent opinion it represents.<sup>17</sup>

Alan Lee has contended that throughout the eighteenth century, the press served a vital function of horizontally connecting the various segments of the reading public—a purpose that de Nie insists carried over into the nineteenth century.<sup>18</sup> The public then would almost certainly have gained an appreciation for that exchange of ideas through the editorials, which would refer to other concurring and conflicting opinions, or through serial columns such as the *Pall Mall Gazette*'s “Epitome of Opinion,” which purposefully encapsulated snippets of the editorial pages of the London and provincial papers on issues of national importance. In this way, not only did provincials gain greater access to the opinion of the Londoners, but perhaps more importantly, Londoners became connected to the opinions on the periphery of the country.

In addition to reflecting sentiments, the nineteenth-century press was also an invaluable agent for creating public opinion. Having largely been the mouthpiece of the government in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, by the mid-nineteenth century the press had effectively become a “fourth estate” and challenged parliament as the leading center of political discussion.<sup>19</sup> At the end of the nineteenth century, imperial critics, such as J. A. Hobson, raised concerns that the press was effectively being coopted by imperialists in order to further propagandize the public. It is those sentiments and

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<sup>17</sup> Edward Lytton Bulwer, *England and the English*, vol. xlviii (Paris: Baudry's European Library, 1833), 245.

<sup>18</sup> De Nie, *The Eternal Paddy*, 30.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.



opinions that the present study is interested in exploring. Both as a reflection of public sentiment and as an important proactive agent in driving public interest, the content of the national and provincial press provides a vital conduit for the researcher to create a composite interpretation of the public discourse.<sup>20</sup> However, both functions have their imperfections. As a reflection, one must consider whether even the composite opinions by the press are fully representative of society as a whole. For as de Nie points out, Victorians largely regarded the public opinion associated with the press to be closely attached to the middle class.<sup>25</sup> As a proactive force, meanwhile, one must question—as does Porter—the degree to which such ideas were readily accepted by the public. Taking those issues into account, when this thesis speaks of the public’s opinions on the issue of imperialism, what is meant by this is the opinions of the public in so far as they were expressed by the press.

The focus of this thesis is the perception of the Sudan Campaign within the public sphere. It is therefore situated within the scholarship of the past thirty years which looks at the intersection of culture and imperialism. The work of John MacKenzie has been influential in understanding this intersection. His pioneering work *Propaganda and Empire* has helped to shift the focus to cultural history at home which had an influence of creating ideology regarding empire as well as feeling.<sup>21</sup> More recently Andrew Griffiths in his book *The New Journalism, The Imperialism, and the Fiction of Empire*,

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<sup>20</sup> For the purposes of this study, the phrase “national press” refers to metropolitan papers, such as the London *Times*, that reached out to a nationwide audience. <sup>25</sup> De Nie, *The Eternal Paddy*, 29.

<sup>21</sup> John M. MacKenzie, *Propaganda and Empire: The Manipulation of British Public Opinion, 1860-1960*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984)

1870-1900 has linked the emergence of New Journalism in the late nineteenth century with the New Imperialism of the era.<sup>22</sup> Journalism and fiction worked in concert to sensationalize events in the colonies for enjoyment in the metropole.

At the center of the emergence of New Imperialism and New Journalism was the hero. Heroic worship became a mainstay of Victorian culture and helped reinforce fealty to the larger imperial project. Eric Hobsbawm's "Mass Producing Traditions: Europe, 1870-1914" in his and Terrance Ranger (eds.) *The Invention of Tradition*, interprets the rise of hero-cults as a feature of the emerging nation-state.<sup>23</sup> The essay emphasizes the role of the state in promoting heroes through public monuments, ceremonies and schooling, and shows how distinctive national stories were part of a broader global process.

Graham Dawson's *Soldier Heroes: British Adventure, Empire and the Imagining of Masculinities* explores the making of the soldier hero mythology drawing upon the work of 19th century adventure stories.<sup>24</sup> Edward Berenson's *Heroes of Empire: Five Charismatic Men and the Conquest of Empire* looks at popular heroes in both France and Britain (including Charles Gordon) to explore how the popular press creates heroes and encourages imperial hero worship.<sup>25</sup> Bernard Porter's *The Absent Minded Imperialists*

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<sup>22</sup> Andrew Griffiths, *The New Journalism, The Imperialism, and the Fiction of Empire, 1870-1900*, (New York: Springer, 2015).

<sup>23</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, "Mass Producing Traditions: Europe, 1870-1914" in *The Invention of Tradition*, eds. Eric Hobsbawm and Terrance Ranger, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

<sup>24</sup> Graham Dawson, *Soldier Heroes: British Adventure, Empire and the Imagining of Masculinities*, (New York: Routledge, 2005).

<sup>25</sup> Edward Berenson, *Heroes of Empire: Five Charismatic Men and the Conquest of Empire*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).

includes Gordon in his discussion of imperial sacrifices, using him as an example of someone willing to make the ultimate sacrifice in service to his country<sup>26</sup>. Porter does not analyze the implications of his death in a larger imperial context, but relegates further discussion of the matter to an endnote. Porter's book aims to describe the entire imperial project undertaken by Britain.

This connection between empire and culture in the metropole, has been made possible due to recent scholarship that have pushed for a more constituted view of the British Empire. Catherine Hall's *Civilising Subjects* has been the standout in this new vein of scholarship. She studies the relationship between Birmingham and Jamaica in the middle of the nineteenth century.<sup>27</sup> The missionaries and businessmen from Birmingham who traveled to Jamaica had non-conformist behavior due to being shaped by both the province and the metropole. Discourse between the colonist and imperialist were shaped by a network of transnational flows.

I am, however, also interested in seeing the public discussion of the Sudan in terms of ideology. Of importance is David Armitage's *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire*, an intellectual history of the idea of Empire as used by British thinkers from the middle sixteenth to the middle eighteenth centuries.<sup>28</sup> He argues that "Empire" was used differently depending on the context. The bringing together of these various

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<sup>26</sup> Bernard Porter, *The Absent-minded Imperialists: Empire, Society, and Culture in Britain*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

<sup>27</sup> Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Colony and Metropole in the English Imagination, 1830-1867*, (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2002).

<sup>28</sup> David Armitage, *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

understandings of what “Empire” meant was taken for granted as a given by later thinkers such as John Seeley. For them, the British Protestant, laissez-faire, free, and maritime traditions were a comforting idea with no real analytic value. Thus, a false continuity of English dominance over Scots, Welsh, and Irish in Britain was combined with British dominance over colonial holdings.

This view of a continuous Empire, was counter to the traditional view of a First and Second Empire. The First Empire encompassed the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and the creation of an industrial Britain. The Second British Empire went from the late eighteenth century up to decolonization after the Second World War, in which Britain became a world military and economic power.

But, approaching an ideological and cultural history of Britain also moves away from the economic explanations of early scholarship. J.A. Hobson challenged this theory in his book *Imperialism: a Study*, published after the disastrous Boer War.<sup>29</sup> Hobson argues that Britain’s imperialism was not driven by geo-politics but by the economic interest of capitalists. In a similar vein, V.I. Lenin’s *Imperialism, The Highest Stage of Capitalism* shared the critical anti-imperialism of Hobson, but with a materialistic interpretation of the economic nature of British imperialism.<sup>30</sup> By the 1950s Oxbridge historians Ronald Robinson and John Gallagher would posit a more complex model of the British Empire.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> John Atkinson Hobson, *Imperialism: A Study*, (London: James Nisbett & Co., 1902).

<sup>30</sup> V.I. Lenin, *Imperialism, The Highest Stage of Capitalism*, (London: Penguin, 2010).

<sup>31</sup> Gallagher, John and Ronald Robinson. "The Imperialism of Free Trade," *The Economic History Review* (August 1953) 6#1, 1–15.

Robinson and Gallagher argued that the ministers in Whitehall were more interested in an informal imperialism of *lassiez-faire* to formal imperialism with its use of governing and occupying forces. The men of the colonial office were true believers in political economy, wanting to open territory and markets for commerce and trade. Indirect rule and gun boat diplomacy were not the ends but the mean of imperialism.

The 1990s would see a revisionist view of Robinson and Gallagher challenged by P.J. Cain and A. G. Hopkins. They argued that the British bureaucracy was not autonomous but instead the tools of gentleman capitalists. The expansion of the Empire was steered by the gentry who were in charge of the purse in the City and had relations with the imperial government. Through the alliance of both capitalism and politics expansion was driven, not by true believers on the periphery of the Empire.

What connects Hobson, Robinson and Gallagher, and Cain and Hopkins is their agreement that the expansion of the British Empire can best be interpreted by analyzing domestic economic interests. For Robinson and Gallagher the Imperial regime was used to make sure that financiers had free access to capital markets. Private and public sectors merged to use the power of the Empire's political, military, and economic arsenal to ensure that commodities went to and from Britain and her dominions.

Though this thesis will primarily focus on the metropole, it will be mindful of the racist views of its subjects. Of importance in this aim is the scholarship in recent years on British colonialism inspired by literary theory and anthropology, which started to challenge the empirical assumptions of previous British Empire scholarship. Thinkers

like Michel Foucault and Edward Said have proved important to this development.

Timothy Mitchell's *Colonising Egypt* is an example of the convergence and influence of Said's Orientalism and Foucault's modern surveillance state.<sup>32</sup> Colonialism created in Egypt what could be readable to the European public, both as an Orientalist spectacle, and as a reform project within Modernity. Thus, Europeans visiting Egypt had mixed feelings about the place due to their inability to get a "vantage point" on Cairo, due to their inability to find its abjectness.

Therefore, the British had to create Egypt as an object in order to control it. This hegemonic view of the British vis a vis Egypt is complicated by Eve M. Troutt Powell's *A Different Shade of Colonialism: Egypt, Great Britain, and the Mastery of the Sudan*.<sup>33</sup> She argues that the colonizing of the Sudan by Egypt, a "colonized colonizer," eliminates the binary view of the power between the colonized and the colonizer, and thus creates a much more fluid view of Imperialism. Powell's work is part of a larger project by those working in Middle Eastern and Ottoman history pushing back against perceived notions of the decline of the Ottoman Empire. Cemal Kafadar's "The Question of Ottoman Decline" objected to the theory of decline. The theory creates a paradigm of decline vis a vis the modern west without any observational evidence.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Timothy Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).

<sup>33</sup> Eve Troutt Powell, *A Different Shade of Colonialism: Egypt, Great Britain, and the Master of the Sudan*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

<sup>34</sup> Cemal Kafadar, "The Question of Ottoman Decline," in *Harvard Middle East and Islamic Review*, 1999.

However, many histories of the British in Africa focus more on actual British colonies, not areas that were only tangentially British. As Sudan was only under Britain as part of a condominium with Egypt, it does not receive the same level of attention as other British colonies. Sudan does, however, factor into these studies due to the British involvement there in 1885 and 1898. The other way that historians currently tackle the problem of Britain's involvement in Africa is by focusing specifically on only one aspect of its imperial project. Zine Magubane, for example, has worked on the colonial project in South Africa. Her work, including *Bringing the Empire Home: Race, Class and Gender in Britain and Colonial South Africa*, focuses on life in Africa and how Africans are perceived in England.<sup>35</sup> Magubane's studies on the Anglo-Boer War show the way that a historical event in Africa, in this case the Boer War, was used to rally support for granting suffrage to women in London.<sup>36</sup>

Historiography regarding the Scramble for Africa is likewise fruitful in framing this study. Robinson and Gallagher posited that the British presence in Egypt had less to do with economic concerns and more to do with wanting to protect British interests in the region, mainly the route to India.<sup>37</sup> Indigenous nationalism in Egypt in 1882 was the catalyst for British expansion further into Africa, first in Uganda, then Kenya, and ending with the conquest of the Sudan in 1898. However, I agree with more recent scholarship

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<sup>35</sup> Zine Magubane, *Bringing the Empire Home: Race, Class and Gender in Britain and Colonial South Africa*, (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2004).

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> John E. Flin, "Britain and the Scramble for Africa," *The Oxford History of the British Empire: Volume V: Historiography*, ed. Robin Winks, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 457.

that has suggested that the start of colonization can be pushed back to 1875. With the push by Prime Minister Disraeli for a more active imperialism, one can view the Scramble of Africa in concert with military actions in Afghanistan, Egypt, the Zulu War, and South Africa.

A more reactionary push back against Said and his Orientalism comes from David Cannadine's *Ornamentalism: How the British Saw their Empire*.<sup>38</sup> Cannadine's thesis stipulates that the British strove to put in place a hierarchal and class system in their colonies that mirrored the system in place at home in Britain. This view plays down the role that race had in the Empire and its paternal approach to the non-white inhabitants of its colonies. Cannadine can thus be seen in the vein of recent more apologetic conservative scholarship on the Empire. Most famously is Niall Ferguson's *Empire: How Britain Made the Modern World* which seeks to explain how the Empire was a force of good for the world due to its imposition of free trade.<sup>39</sup>

By exploring the intersection between the Sudan Campaign and the British public sphere, the present work responds to MacKenzie's invitation for further inquiries into the intersection of Britain's colonial wars and popular culture, as well as Thompson's desire for attention to the impact that imperialism had on domestic politics and the empire's role in shaping national identity.<sup>40</sup> Taking into account that Britishness,

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<sup>38</sup> David Cannadine, *Ornamentalism: How the British Saw their Empire*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

<sup>39</sup> Niall Ferguson, *Empire: How Britain Made the Modern World*, (New York: Basic Books, 2004).

<sup>40</sup> John M. MacKenzie, ed., *Popular Imperialism and the Military*, 221; Thompson, *Imperial Britain*, 1-9.



as discussed by Linda Colley, Keith Robbins, Richard Weight, and Robert Colls, was and continues to be a construction that has existed above, and as a composite of, English, Scottish, Irish, and Welsh identities, it is only fitting to assess the British relationship with the empire along those lines.<sup>41</sup> Indeed, while those communities almost certainly had a common point of reference in regards to the imperial wars and their repercussions, it is also highly likely that responses would not have been uniform, and that they would have been perceived differently and possibly co-opted for entirely different purposes and ends, depending on regional allegiances within the British polity.

In the subsequent chapters this thesis traces the unfolding events in Sudan as the press and media expounded on Britain's proper response. Chapter 2 looks at the political debate surrounding New Imperialism. Conservative and Liberal attitudes toward empire affected policy, resulting in a British presence in Egypt and the Sudan. These attitudes would then affect how the government responded to the situation on the ground with the Mahdi and Charles Gordon. The resulting push for Gordon to go to Khartoum, and the response to his death is explored in Chapter 3. Here I argue that the activist press led by W.T. Stead fueled pressure on the Gladstone government to sending Gordon to Khartoum, then pressuring the government in efforts to save him. The reaction of grief to his death, combined with his previous elevation in the pages of newspapers across Britain would help fuel the heroic image of Gordon. The final chapter looks at the wider media of literature, journals, and treasure of conquest to explore how the romanticization of empire coalesced around events in the Sudan. This larger media landscape fed off the

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<sup>41</sup> Ward, *Britishness Since 1870*, 6-7.

popularization of Gordon and the zeal of reporters for action, but also used the imperial imaginary to reinforce larger notions of individuals role in the larger Empire. Thus, the Sudan Campaign and its representations within the larger print culture was a vessel for a larger debate on the British Empire itself.

## CHAPTER 2. THE SUDAN CAMPAIGN

The European powers engaged in a dogged pursuit of territorial possessions during the late nineteenth century, particularly in Africa and Asia. This “New Imperialism,” as it has since been known, established British rule and influence in non-European regions of the world. The 1875 purchase of the Egyptian Suez Canal by Benjamin Disraeli was the catalyst for this new pursuit of empire for empire’s sake. This “New Imperialism” caused push back by Liberals such as Disraeli’s nemesis William Gladstone. Gladstone saw imperialism in Africa as folly, and thus fought its expansion. These two visions of Britain would forge Britain and Charles Gordon into conflict in Egypt and the Sudan.

In this chapter I argue that the Sudan Campaign was representative of the greater Victorian adventures situated around the differing conservative and liberal positions surrounding “New Imperialism.” Starting with the political feud between Disraeli and Gladstone the events in the Sudan were both the result of and a catalyst for the debate between proponents of “Little England” and “Big England.” The former wanting a less imperial Britain, the latter wanting to grow Britain’s imperial presence.

Thus, the Big England policies of Disraeli, including the purchase of the Suez Canal, would lead to an outsize British presence in Egypt and by proxy the Sudan. This presence expatriated tensions within the Sudan towards their foreign rulers, creating the rise of the Mahdi and the need for British intervention to evacuate the city of Khartoum. The desire of the British public for Charles Gordon to lead this evacuation would come

head to head with the Little England mentality of Gladstone, ultimately ending in tragedy.

### 2.1 The Veiled Protectorate

In the nineteenth century capitalist industrialization and nationalism fueled the subjugation of non-European lands. The British Empire alone accounted for over a quarter of the world's land mass and people. The conquest of Africa during the 1880s provides the clearest example of the "New Imperialism" that would continue into the twentieth century. The so-called "Dark Continent" was explored and colonized by the British starting in Egypt and eventually working south to the Cape colony.

The area of Egypt, the Red Sea and the Sudan north of Equatoria was technically under the control of the Sultan of the Ottoman Empire. However, by the mid-nineteenth century, this area of Africa was effectively an autonomous region under the purview of the Khedive of Egypt. The Khedive by the 1870s was in significant debt.<sup>42</sup> The British, who had a vested interest in preserving the Ottoman Empire to protect British interests in the region, bought the Khedive's shares in the Suez Canal in 1875. Thus, a "veiled protectorate" was created in which the Egyptian state was on paper self-ruling, but in reality the British through Sir Evelyn Baring were in charge.<sup>43</sup> This "veiled protectorate" led by the British led to a military intervention on behalf of the Khedive. The first intervention was the suppression of the Mehemet Tawfiq Pasha army rebellion of 1881-1882, and the second was the Sudan Campaign of 1884.

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<sup>42</sup> Darwin, 308.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, 309.

Having assumed responsibility for Egypt the British were additionally burdened with overseeing the Sudan. Annexed by Egypt in 1821, the Sudan had been in open rebellion since 1881. That revolt was led by Muhammad Ahmad, the son of a Sudanese boat builder, who proclaimed himself the Mahdi (the Expected One), who called for a jihad against Turkish rule. Over the next two years, the movement gained strength. Defeating sizeable Egyptian armies that were sent against it, the Mahdi's forces contributed to and benefited from the instability caused by the Arabi revolt.<sup>44</sup> With his government propped up by the British military, Tewfik sought to reassert control over the Sudan and eliminate the Mahdi threat to Upper Egypt. In early 1883, therefore, he dispatched an Egyptian army of 10,000 men, many of whom were survivors of Arabi's army at Tel-el-Kebir. The army was officered by British soldiers and commanded by Colonel William Hicks, who was a veteran of the Indian Army and, in being hired by the khedive, was elevated to the rank of general. After drilling and training his army for several months in Omdurman, Hicks had succeeded in clearing Mahdists from the region between the White and Blue Niles by the end of May 1883. Encouraged by these results Tewfik and his ministers sought to reassert Egyptian control over Kordofan, a region that lay southwest of the capital at Khartoum. Gladstone, Baring and other British officials opposed such a move, because they feared the financial strain a Sudanese dependency might put on the weakened Egyptian state. However, because the British were preparing to turn over full control of Egypt to the khedive, including drawing down their military presence there, and because they wanted no part in the Sudan question, they chose to

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<sup>44</sup> Robin Neillands, *The Dervish Wars: Gordon and Kitchener in the Sudan, 1880-1898* (London: John Murray, 1996), 59-67.

refrain as much as possible from interfering in the matter. Leaving Omdurman on 8 September with a force numbering close to 10,000 men, Hicks's expedition into Kordofan met with disaster on 5 November. Abushed at El Obeid, Hicks's force was almost completely annihilated.<sup>45</sup>

This defeat left 32,000 Egyptian soldiers cut off in garrisons in Khartoum, Sennar, and other places. When news of the disaster reached London about two weeks later, it immediately raised questions about Egypt's long-term presence in the Sudan and forced the cabinet to reconsider Britain's Egyptian policy. Prompted by General Wolseley, Hartington as war secretary argued that Britain was bound to support Egypt in retaining control over Khartoum and its surrounding regions for the sake of preserving British prestige and protecting the route to India,. At the same time, he believed that it was reasonable that Egypt be persuaded to evacuate from the provinces of Kordofan, Darfur, and Fashoda, which lacked strategic importance.<sup>46</sup> Gladstone concurred with Baring, who had recently been named British consul-general, that it would be impossible for Egypt to hold on to even those limited sectors of the Sudan without British assistance.<sup>47</sup> Lord Northbrook soon agreed that it would be impossible for Egypt to retain control over its southern neighbor on its own and that the operation was too costly for the Turks or Britain to pursue.<sup>48</sup> But when Baring advised the khedive in early

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<sup>45</sup> Robinson and Gallagher, *Africa and the Victorians*, 132-33; Pakenham, *The Scramble for Africa*, 214; Michael Barthorp, *Blood-Red Desert Sand: The British Invasion of Egypt and the Sudan, 1882-1898* (London: Cassel, 1984), 79-80.

<sup>46</sup> Holland, *Life of Spencer Compton*, 1: 411-12.

<sup>47</sup> Matthew, *Gladstone*, 143.

<sup>48</sup> Robinson and Gallagher, *Africa and the Victorians*, 133; Bernard Mallet, *Thomas George Earl of Northbrook, G.C.S.Q.: a Memoir* (New York: Longmans, 1908), 174-175.

December to abandon the territory south of Aswan, Tewfik's ministers summarily resigned rather than take responsibility for relinquishing Egyptian territory. Bankrupt and with his army destroyed, the khedive was powerless to defend his own borders let alone to withdraw from the Sudan without assistance. Recognizing the situation, the cabinet was obliged to assume responsibility for the protection of Egypt proper and the Red Sea coast.<sup>49</sup> The political effect of this decision was that instead of advancing the process of granting Egypt its independence, British oversight was all the more formalized. The khedive was relegated, for all intents and purposes, to the status of a puppet ruler, with the real decision-making power residing in Baring's hands.<sup>50</sup>

The task of evacuating more than 33,000 Egyptian troops and civilians out of the Sudan fell to Major General Charles "Chinese" Gordon.<sup>51</sup> A fervent Christian who avidly supported charitable and humanitarian causes, Gordon had previously served as governor general of Equatoria and the Sudan under Khedive Ismail in the 1870s, and he had used his position to suppress the slave trade.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Pakenham, *The Scramble for Africa*, 214-15; Robinson and Gallagher, *Africa and the Victorians*, 134.

<sup>50</sup> Paul Knaplund, *The British Empire, 1815-1939* (London: Harper Bros, 1941), 418-19. The French and German governments protested Britain's unilateral actions, but there was little those powers could realistically do to force the British from their position in Egypt. Nevertheless, for the next twenty years France harbored a grudge against Britain, and the fracturing of the Anglo-French cordiale in Egypt caused France to gradually drift toward a military alliance with Russia. Taylor, *The Struggle for Mastery in Europe*, 289-90.

<sup>51</sup> Godfrey Elton, *Gordon of Khartoum* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1955), 280-89. Gordon's nickname was derived from his role in aiding the Chinese emperor's armies against the Taiping Rebellion in the 1860s. For an exhaustive study of Gordon's first governorship of the Sudan, see Alice Moore-Harell, *Gordon and the Sudan: Prologue to the Mahdiyya, 1877-1880* (London: Frank Cass, 2001).

<sup>52</sup> *DNB*, 8:169-73.

On February 18, 1885, British officials sent Major General Gordon to Khartoum as Governor-General for the Sudan for the second time in his career.<sup>53</sup> Under the authority of the Egyptian Khedive, Gordon was ordered to end Egyptian rule in the Sudan, evacuate soldiers, officials, and their families, and make the Sudan a self-governing polity. Prime Minister William Gladstone saw Gordon's role as retreat and abandonment from the Sudan, and saw no need for a military presence in the Sudanese interior.<sup>54</sup>

Gordon's commitment to what he was a mandate for a form of self-government in the Sudan would lead to public cries for British troops to help the General in his noble mission led by Conservatives, the press, Secretary of State for War, the Adjutant General, and everyday citizens. By 1885, the Gordon Relief effort was sent to the Sudan, however it would be too late. Gordon would be found by relief forces dead, his severed head on a spike. Gordon would become a martyr of the Empire, the embodiment of the "stiff upper lip" of Victorian Imperials and an example of moral character. But the arguments between politicians and officials leading up to his death belied the arguments of the role of Empire and the British in the world.

## 2.2 Gladstone versus Disraeli

The views of the Empire and foreign policy surrounded the two big figures of Victorian politics- Benjamin Disraeli and William Gladstone. Gladstone was skeptical of

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<sup>53</sup> Spiers, 108.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid, 112.



foreign entanglements and was a proponent of "rights for the savage."<sup>55</sup> Disraeli strove to preserve the Empire using the principles of "Tory Democracy."<sup>56</sup> Key to his preservation effort was India, the so-called "jewel" of the British Empire. To this end Disraeli purchased the four million pounds worth of Suez Canal shares..<sup>57</sup> This move prevented France from taking control of a vital trade route, making shipping from or to India and the Far East cheaper. Gladstone claimed the purchase would give way to the military occupation of Egypt. A prediction that would be proved correct. However, Disraeli was primarily concerned with protecting British economic strength.

For Gladstone, imperialism meant more burdens on British taxpayers and more risks of war:

Consider how we have conquered, planted, annexed, and appreciated at all the points of the compass, so that at four point on the surface of the earth there not some region or some spot of British domain at hand. Nor even from their for points are we about...and then I ask you what quarrel can arise between two countries or what war, in which you may not, if you do so minded, to set up British interests as a ground of interference.

This view was consistent with those liberals associated with the Manchester School. This group was derided as "Little Englanders" for their desire for less Empire and more investment at home and in the colonial possessions that Britain already was responsible for.<sup>58</sup> (Big Englander was used for those in favor of more imperialism). This "Little

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<sup>55</sup> David Bebbington, *The Mind of Gladstone*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 262.

<sup>56</sup> John K. Walton, *Disraeli*, (London: Routledge, 1990), 20.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid*, 43.

<sup>58</sup> Goodwin Smith, "Manchester School," *Contemporary Review*, D.A Hammer and John Morely, *Liberal Intellectuals in Politics*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966), 67.

England" perspective on Imperialism would inform how Gladstone dealt with the crisis in Sudan and the Gordon affair.

In April 1885, Sudan was superseded as the utmost area of imperial concern to the British government. Instead, there was an incident in Afghanistan, which was under limited autonomous rule and regarded as a buffer-zone by the British and the Russians. Gladstone feared that this incident would lead conflict between the two empires and recalled the troops from Wolseley's expedition back to Egypt in anticipation of their having to be sent to Afghanistan. The situation would not lead to war, as it was quickly diffused by the Afghan leader, but the troop recall remained in effect.<sup>59</sup> Due to the recall of soldiers, Britain would not become involved in Sudan again under Gladstone. The Mahdi's death in June 1885, which led to an internal crisis in the country, only cemented the region's lack of importance.<sup>60</sup>

### 2.3 The Sudan Campaign

Having assumed responsibility for Egypt—however reluctantly—Gladstone's administration was additionally burdened with overseeing the Sudan. Annexed by Egypt in 1821, the Sudan had been in open rebellion since 1881. That revolt led by Muhammad Ahmad, the son of a Sudanese boat builder, who proclaimed himself the Mahdi (the Expected One), who called for a jihad against Turkish rule. Over the next two years, the movement gained strength. Defeating size able Egyptian armies that were

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<sup>59</sup> Julian Symons, *England's Pride: The Story of the Gordon Relief Expedition* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1965), 268-269.

<sup>60</sup> P.M. Holt, *The Mahdist State in the Sudan: 1881-1898: A Study of its Origins Development and Overthrow* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), 135.

sent against it, the Mahdi's forces contributed to and benefited from the instability caused by the Arabi revolt.<sup>61</sup> With his government propped up by the British military, Tewfik sought to reassert control over the Sudan and eliminate the Mahdi threat to Upper Egypt. In early 1883, therefore, he dispatched an Egyptian army of 10,000 men, many of whom were survivors of Arabi's army at Tel-el-Kebir. The army was officered by British soldiers and commanded by Colonel William Hicks, who was a veteran of the Indian Army and, in being hired by the khedive, was elevated to the rank of general. After drilling and training his army for several months in Omdurman, Hicks had succeeded in clearing Mahdists from the region between the White and Blue Niles by the end of May 1883.

Encouraged by these results Tewfik and his ministers sought to reassert Egyptian control over Kordofan, a region that lay southwest of the capital at Khartoum.

Gladstone, Baring and other British officials opposed such a move, because they feared the financial strain a Sudanese dependency might put on the weakened Egyptian state. However, because the British were preparing to turn over full control of Egypt to the khedive, including drawing down their military presence there, and because they wanted no part in the Sudan question, they chose to refrain as much as possible from interfering in the matter. Leaving Omdurman on 8 September with a force numbering close to 10,000 men, Hicks's expedition into Kordofan met with disaster on 5 November.

Ambushed at El Obeid, Hicks's force was almost completely annihilated.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Robin Neillands, *The Dervish Wars: Gordon and Kitchener in the Sudan, 1880-1898* (London: John Murray, 1996), 59-67.

<sup>62</sup> Michael Barthorp, *Blood-Red Desert Sand: The British Invasion of Egypt and the Sudan, 1882-1898* (London: Cassel, 1984), 79-80.

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<sup>63</sup> Bernard Henry Holland, *Life of Spencer Compton*, (London: Longman, Green, and Co., 1911), 411-12.

<sup>64</sup> Matthew, H. C. G, *Gladstone, 1878-1898*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 143.

<sup>65</sup> Robinson and Gallagher, *Africa and the Victorians*, 133; Bernard Mallet, *Thomas George Earl of Northbrook, G.C.S.Q.: a Memoir* (New York: Longmans, 1908), 174-175.

proper and the Red Sea coast.<sup>66</sup> The political effect of this decision was that instead of advancing the process of granting Egypt its independence, British oversight was all the more formalized. The khedive was relegated, for all intents and purposes, to the status of a puppet ruler, with the real decision-making power residing in Baring's hands.<sup>67</sup>

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There were initially significant reservations about sending Gordon, both in London and in Cairo. At the time he agreed to accept the cabinet's offer to go to the Sudan in mid-January 1884, Gordon had already resigned his commission in the British army to accept a contract with King Leopold of Belgium to eradicate the Afro-Arab slave trade in the Congo.<sup>69</sup> Aware of Gordon's tendency to interpret his orders to serve his own convictions, Gladstone was wary about giving him the power to act on his own

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<sup>66</sup> Pakenham, *The Scramble for Africa*, 214-15; Robinson and Gallagher, *Africa and the Victorians*, 134.

<sup>67</sup> Paul Knaplund, *The British Empire, 1815-1939* (London: Harper Bros, 1941), 418-19.

<sup>68</sup> Godfrey Elton, *Gordon of Khartoum* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1955), 280-89. Gordon's nickname was derived from his role in aiding the Chinese emperor's armies against the Taiping Rebellion in the 1860s. For an exhaustive study of Gordon's first governorship of the Sudan, see Alice Moore-Harell, *Gordon and the Sudan: Prologue to the Mahdiyya, 1877-1880* (London: Frank Cass, 2001).

<sup>69</sup> Lord Elton, *Gordon of Khartoum*, (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1995), 225-26, 269, 271.

and preferred that he be given only advisory responsibilities.<sup>70</sup> In fact, Sir Edward Walter Hamilton, Gladstone's personal secretary, recorded that "[Gordon] seems to be a half-cracked fatalist; and what can one expect from such a man?"<sup>71</sup> Meanwhile, Baring had initially opposed the appointment of Gordon or any other British officer for that matter, but he also believed that the Egyptians were incapable of administering the situation, which called for both an advisory and an executive functionary. At the urging of his military advisors--some of whom had served previously with Gordon--Baring became convinced that Gordon was the only officer suitable to effect the evacuation of the Sudan.<sup>72</sup>

Gordon met with a select cabinet committee comprised of Hartington, Granville, Dilke, and Northbrook to finalize his commission on January 18. The committee offered potentially conflicting instructions to him. The members told Gordon to proceed to the Sudan in an advisory capacity and to "report on the best way of withdrawing garrisons, settling the country, *and* to perform other duties as may be entrusted to him by the khedive's government" through Baring.<sup>73</sup> Gladstone was notably absent from that final meeting, as he was resting at his home in Hawarden, and his absence may well have contributed to his subsequent befuddlement over Gordon's actions and his persistent

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<sup>70</sup> Gladstone to Granville, 16 January 1884, in John Morley, *Life of Gladstone*, volume 2 (London: Macmillan, 1907), 390.

<sup>71</sup> D. W. R. Bahlman, ed. *The Diary of Sir Edward Walter Hamilton 1880-1885*, volume 2, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), 545.

<sup>72</sup> Roger Owen, *Lord Cromer: Victorian Imperialist, Edwardian Proconsul* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 191-93; Bernard Allen, *Gordon and the Sudan* (London: Macmillan, 1931), 226.

<sup>73</sup> Bernard Henry Holland, *Life of Spencer Compton*, (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1911), 418.

belief that Gordon had only been given at most advisory responsibilities. “We sent Gordon on a mission of peace and liberation,” he later wrote. “I never understood how it was that Gordon’s mission of peace became one of war.”<sup>74</sup> As Elton notes in his account of Gordon’s commissioning, Hartington’s report to Gladstone made no mention of the reference to Gordon being authorized to perform “other duties.” Consequently, Gladstone, who intended from the onset that Gordon only be sent in an advisory capacity, remained convinced that Gordon embarked on nothing more than a fact-finding and advisory mission.<sup>106</sup>

Gordon, however, understood his orders to be executive in nature. Recounting his meeting with the ministers to his sister Augusta the following day, he wrote:

Wolseley came for me, I went with him and saw Granville, Hartington, Dilke, and Northbrook; they said had I seen W. and did I understand their ideas. I said yes, and repeated what W. had said to me as to their ideas, which was ‘they would evacuate Sudan.’ They were pleased and said, that was their idea. Would I go? I said ‘yes.’ They said ‘when?’ I said, ‘To-night.’ And it was over.<sup>75</sup>

Immediately following his meeting with the cabinet ministers, Gordon, accompanied by Lt. Col. J. D. H. Stewart as his staff officer, departed for Egypt by way of the evening boat-train to Calais. They arrived in Port Said on 24 January.

As the Mahdi grew stronger, Gordon became more isolated in Khartoum and getting messages through to him became much harder, leaving him to work in a more autonomous fashion. Before the Mahdi took the area directly surrounding Gordon, there was communication between Khartoum and London, even if it was infrequent.

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<sup>74</sup> Richard Shannon, *Gladstone: The Heroic Minister*, (London: Alan Lane, 1999), 327.

<sup>75</sup> Gordon to Augusta, 19 January 1884, in Wilfred Scawen Blunt, *Gordon at Khartoum: Being a Personal Narrative of Events in Continuation of “A Secret History of the English Occupation of Egypt”* (London: Stephen Swift, 1911), 512.

Afterwards, Gordon was essentially alone in Khartoum with his Egyptian troops. He had no idea what his home government wished him to do and no idea if any help or reinforcements were coming to his aid. Soon, Gordon and his few troops were under siege in Khartoum and his local government was effectively out of money, but he was unwilling to leave the country to the Mahdi.<sup>76</sup>

This state of siege would last until the end of Gordon's life. He would not receive much meaningful communication from the British government, nor would he know whether an expedition to aid him would reach him in time. By December 1884, he realized that the relief expedition he had long sought, which would be led by Lord Garnet Wolsely with the assistance of General Gerald Graham, would probably not reach him in time. At the close of the journal he kept during his solitary occupation, he wrote his farewells to his fellow officers, acknowledging his frustration with not knowing if he would be rescued, and finally closing with an acceptance that there was nothing he could do about it: "but this is spilt milk," he wrote, "Good bye."<sup>77</sup> Charles George Gordon would be dead a month later, still attempting to hold Khartoum.

The expedition continued until the already-discussed international developments forced the end of it in May 1885. This end, which was marked by one final transmission from Wolseley, had a mixed result at best. The Mahdi had not been smashed. The British withdrew to save face, and Wolseley's previous reputation for military excellence was

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<sup>76</sup> Gordon himself invented his own paper currency to allow the government to function, but the only thing backing his money was his own reputation. For more information on the currency, see Elton, 327.

<sup>77</sup> Colville, part II, 231



diminished. His final dispatch also highlighted the hard work of the men who participated in his expedition and the fact that the failure was not their fault. As the concluding lines of his telegram state, "No one can regret more than I do the fall of that place, but in common with all my countrymen I look back with pride to the gallant struggle made by our troops to save Khartum and its heroic defender."<sup>78</sup> Like Kitchener, Wolseley was also able to express his personal feelings in the official report of the expedition, and thus, was able to salute his troops as well as express his own discomfort with the way his mission was ended.

#### 2.4 Aftermath

If Gordon had not been a celebrity in the British Empire, discussions about the expedition would have probably ended with the Wolseley dispatch quoted above, but he was not an average man. In London, his death was greeted with an outpouring of grief in all levels of society. Furthermore, it was a contentious issue in Parliament and even in Gladstone's own cabinet. Although Gordon's death did not directly bring down the government, it can be credited with turning the public opinion away from the Liberal Party in general and Gladstone in particular. The long shadow of Gordon's death would still be present in imperial decisions until the end of Britain's involvement in Sudan, which did not occur until almost a century later. He would be invoked by those who supported continued imperial expansion; however, his death would also be used by those who wished to curtail the empire. In discussions of the final withdrawal, Gordon's sacrifice is referenced, nearly sixty years after the original events occurred.

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

Regardless of the reasons why Gordon was not rescued in time, disbelief followed by grief was the dominant emotion among members of the British government. Even Gladstone, whose actions had directly led to delays in the expedition reaching Gordon, was dismayed to hear that he had died. Some members of the government were more vocal about the death than others; some took more accountability for their actions than others; but all felt the need to acknowledge Gordon's passing.

Like her ministers, the Queen was very distraught over Gordon's passing. Her attitude towards Gordon, a man whom she would later commemorate by having his bible occupy a place of honor in her home, comes through in the letter that she wrote to various members of the government about his all-too-preventable death.<sup>79</sup> To show this anger publicly, the Queen took the extraordinary step of telegraphing both her Prime Minister and Secretary of War *en clair*. By sending her feelings on the matter in a non-ciphered telegram, the Queen basically announced to anyone who was reading the telegrams, including members of the press, that she blamed the government and was displeased with how her ministers had handled the crisis.<sup>80</sup> This displeasure is also seen in the Queen's other correspondence. Her letter to Spencer Cavendish, the Marquess of Hartington and the Secretary of State for War, is only one example of her feelings about the conditions that led to the fall of Khartoum: "to think that all this might have been

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<sup>79</sup> *Archives of Empire, Volume II: The Scramble for Africa* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 579.

<sup>80</sup> *The Queen and Mr. Gladstone* (New York: Doubleday, Doran & Co., 1934), 638-639.

prevented & many precious lives saved by earlier action is too fearful."<sup>81</sup> This letter to Hartington is only one example of Victoria's grief, anger, and dismay, but she did not excoriate Gladstone for his role in the crisis. Her more vitriolic comments were reserved for the eyes of her Private Secretary, Sir Henry Ponsonby, with whom she had reams of daily correspondence. In these notes, Victoria did not temper her anger against the Prime Minister whom she only grudgingly accepted, nor did she shy away from placing all of the blame for the situation on Gladstone and his government. To Ponsonby she wrote, "Mr. Gladstone and the Government have...Gordon's innocent, noble, heroic blood on their consciences. No one who reflects on how he was sent out, how he was refused, can deny it! It is awful!"<sup>82</sup>

Like most of her subjects, their Queen blamed the government for Gordon's abandonment; unlike most of her subjects, however, she was able to reach out directly to the government and demand accountability regarding its actions. She did so in a direct note to Gladstone the day after the news of Khartoum's fall reached London. In this note, Victoria outlined the two courses of action that the government must take. Logically, the first was to ascertain if Gordon was alive or dead. The second contained a barely-veiled reference to Gladstone's indecision regarding the relief expedition: "the Cabinet will promptly agree to a bold and decided course. Hesitation and half measures would be

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<sup>81</sup> Queen Victoria, "The Queen and the Fall of Khartoum: Telegram *en claire*, 5 February 1885," in *English Historical Documents vol..XII: 1874-1914*, (Bradford: Stephen White Books), 36-37.

<sup>82</sup> Letter from Victoria to Ponsonby, February 17, 1885 in Christopher Hibbert, ed. *Queen Victoria in Her Letters and Journals* (New York: Viking, 1985), 290.

disastrous."<sup>83</sup> From these selections, it is evident that the Queen was personally affected by Gordon's death. It is also clear that she was not willing to believe that his death was merely a result of a bad policy action. As her letter of condolence to the Gordon family stated, the Queen keenly felt Gordon's death, a death that she felt left a permanent "*stain* upon England."<sup>84</sup>

This frequent desire to die for the Sudanese people was one of the points that Gladstone in particular, and the government in general, was quick to use to justify their decision. The War Office and Cabinet's opinion of Gordon, already discussed, indicated that the official feeling on Gordon's choice to remain in Khartoum was that as it was his decision not to leave with the last steamers, the final result was at least partially his fault. The fact that the relief expedition did not reach him in time was really just a failure of planning and hence not a direct decision to abandon him to his fate. Following this line of argument, it is understandable that Gladstone, when the news about the fall of Khartoum reached London, still chose to attend a play that night. His journal entry for that night, February 10, does not mention Gordon. Instead, he merely commented on the play, "The Candidate," which Gladstone noted was "capitally acted."<sup>85</sup> At the time, he was vilified in the press for continuing to enjoy himself when the fate of Gordon was not yet known to the public. However, following the logic that the government was

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 289-290.

<sup>84</sup> Giles St. Aubyn, *Queen Victoria: A Portrait* (New York: Atheneum, 1992), 456.

<sup>85</sup> H.C.G Matthew, ed., *The Gladstone Diaries with Cabinet Minutes and Prime Ministerial Correspondence volume xi July 1883-December 1886* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 293.

employing, Gladstone did not consider his actions to be inappropriate, especially as he was already aware that Gordon's death was almost a certainty because he had already stated as much in a letter to Hartington three days previously.<sup>86</sup>

Many other members of the government were dismayed about the death of Gordon. In the official memorandum of the government and in their personal papers, members of Gladstone's Cabinet, including Hartington and Lord Granville, the Foreign Secretary, expressed their sadness at the expedition's failure. Gordon's death was not anticipated. There were no contingency plans for what the government was going to do if he was killed in Sudan, nor was there a plan for how to replace Gordon at Khartoum. When the government was faced with having to solve these problems, the utter failure to take any of these details into account became known, leading many members of the government to turn further against Gladstone and his administration.

## 2.5 Conclusion

The disaster that was the Gordon Relief was fueled in part by outside pressure from the press on the politicians in Whitehall charged with administering the quagmire that was the Protectorate of Egypt. Gladstone's "Little England" approach to imperialism confronted through the Sudan Campaign the consequences that Disraeli's "Big England" policies had wrought. This political debate between liberal anti-interventionists and conservative interventionists initially coalesced around the campaign for Gordon for Khartoum. As I will show in the next chapter, this campaign, and later debates in the press around the government's reaction to events in Khartoum, would plant the

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<sup>86</sup> 7 February 1885 Letter from Gladstone to Hartington, Matthew, ed., 292.

necessary seeds to create a cult of personality and martyrdom of Charles “Chinese” Gordon.

### CHAPTER 3. THE ACTIVIST PRESS

Since the 18th century, upper and upper-middle classes had consumed newspapers. By the time Gordon's final saga began, the popular press was undergoing a transformation and embracing a new audience: the lower-middle and working classes. Gordon's mission, abandonment, and eventual death were the type of story that newer newspapers thrived upon. The "Gordon affair" was exactly the form of sensation that this medium needed to increase its market share. By the end of the nineteenth century newspapers as varied as the Conservative-Party-supporting *Daily Mail* and the Liberal-leaning *Reynold's News* were covering imperial events, including Queen Victoria's jubilee and several smaller imperial wars in Africa. Gordon's death was only one sensationalistic imperial event during this time, but it was among the earliest to appeal to this new type of New Journalism.

Due to the outsize affect and availability of these newspapers, popular opinion and sentiment could more easily be swayed and appealed to. W.T. Stead of the *Pall Mall Gazette* was influential on not just the genre of journalism he employed, but on promoting political action by appealing to the sentiments of the people. His interview with Charles Gordon would kickstart the movement to send Gordon to Khartoum, and would create the cult of personality surrounding the General. In this chapter I argue that the situation in Khartoum became a daily drama that played out in the British press, thus affecting political debate between conservatives and liberals on the proper role of Britain in the Sudan that mirrored larger debates on Imperialism on the whole. The subsequent

debates would create a ripe situation in which Gordon would become a heroic figure, whose appeal intensified after his death and martyrdom, spurred on by an activist press.

### 3.1 W.T. Stead and Gordon

We have had opportunities of observing a new journalism which a clever and energetic man has lately invented- Matthew Arnold, “Up to Easter”

The editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette* W.T. Stead coined the phrase “New Journalism” to describe his new approach of activist journalism. For Stead his “mission was to labour...[for] the social regeneration of the world.”<sup>87</sup> Under Stead’s leadership the *Gazette* went from Tom Arnold’s “Old Journalism”, whose long-term project was to elevate journalistic practice into “‘criticism’ and thus to the authority literature” to a Liberal and Radical paper.<sup>88</sup> Arnold’s “Old Journalism” concentrated primarily in the 1850s through the 1870s was aimed at high minded audiences (those in power). Thus, it struck an air of anonymity when possible, and strove to straddle both the left and right positions.<sup>89</sup> This middle ground allowed these newspapers to speak on issues with an air of authority.

Stead in 1885 cemented this new approach in his series “Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon,” in which he would purchase a child virgin for the purposes of an

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<sup>87</sup> Estelle W. Stead, *My Father: Personal & Spiritual Reminiscences* (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1913) pp. 140-152.

<sup>88</sup> Matthew Arnold, *Complete Prose Works, Volume II*, (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press), 1990.

<sup>89</sup> Laurel Brake, *Subjugated Knowledges Journalism, Gender and Literature in the Nineteenth Century*, (London: MacMillan Press, 1994) , 90.



expose lambasting prostitution in London. The sensational article would reach one hundred thousand copies in sales and notoriety. But, Stead's approach to a journalism of advocacy would be put in to use in his articles on Gordon in the Sudan.

Stead was friends with Gordon and with his article and interview with Gordon would spearhead the press movement to send Gordon to Khartoum. The title for the article "Chinese Gordon for the Soudan" would become the catchphrase for the pro-Gordon campaign.<sup>90</sup> In the article, Stead set Gordon up in opposition to Sir Evelyn Baring and his policies. Baring and the government wanted to evacuate the Sudan while Gordon equates "evacuation" with "massacre."<sup>91</sup> Stead agreed with Good that "to hold on to Khartoum as hard as we can and as long as we can, and trust to time and tribal jealousies to open as a way of escape for the integral garrison."<sup>92</sup> In other words Gordon and Stead wanted the British forces to stay in Khartoum to extricate the European forces stationed in the Sudanese capital.

Stead saw the relief of the Sudan forces as the way to evacuation similar to how the British "relieved Candahar before we evacuated Afghanistan."<sup>93</sup> Gordon as a great Englishman and expert dealing with the region would be for Stead the perfect man to send "out with *carte blanche*."<sup>94</sup> Stead's interview with Gordon revealed Gordon's belief that a victory of the Muslim Mahdi would embolden the Muslim peoples of Egypt to rise

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<sup>90</sup> W.T. Stead, "Chinese Gordon for the Soudan," The Pall Mall Gazette, January 9, 1884.

<sup>91</sup> Stead.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Stead.

up. He feared that fellow Muslims especially the Turks would be forced to confront the uprisings creating a zero sum game. The British could “either surrender absolutely to the Mahdi or defend Khartoum at all hazards.”<sup>95</sup>

Gordon viewed the leadership in Egypt as corrupt and unable to rule effectively. It was Gordon who was the father-like savior of the Sudanese. “I taught them something of the meaning of liberty and justice.”<sup>96</sup> The Egypt under the corruption of the Turks were oppressive and plunderers of the Sudanese people. The followers of the Mahdi then are not religiously motivated, instead they are angry at the Egyptian-Turkish authorities and their corruption. Under the leadership of someone like Nubar, “the one supremely able awn among Egyptian Ministers,” a capable British Governor-General could be put in leadership.<sup>97</sup>

Of course part of the Sudanese anger was that the Egyptian-Turkish officials would appoint non-Muslims like Gordon to high positions. This anger was wrapped in religious sentiment as the Sufi Sudanese were in opposition to the “dry, scholastic Islam of Egyptian officialdom.”<sup>98</sup> Gordon in his haste to attach the moral savior to himself and other well meaning British officials is blind to the problems that the British presence has added to the rise of the Mahdi.

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> W.T. Stead, “Chinese Gordon on the Soudan,” *The Pall Mall Gazette*, January 9, 1884.

<sup>97</sup> Stead.

<sup>98</sup> Edward Mortimer, *Faith and Power: The Politics of Islam*, (New York: Random House, 1982), 77.

Despite the illuminating interview is insightful in understanding the motives of Gordon, it can be viewed as propaganda as well. Stead later in his career would write on interviewing and remarked that the advice of his first interview subject should be followed by journalists:

First, no interview should ever be published until the proof or the MS. has been submitted to the person interviewed for his correction; and, secondly, the fact that the interview has been read before its publication by the interviewed should never be revealed to the world, otherwise an interview which was known to have been revised by the person interviewed would be almost as compromising to him as if he had written a signed article or made a public speech.<sup>99</sup>

Stead presented Gordon's views without comment and with only the answers to Stead's questions. Along with Stead's "Chinese Gordon for the Soudan" the reader is presented with the case for intervention in Khartoum and the greater Sudan as a check against Muslim uprising in Egypt and the Muslim world. The popularity of Stead's case for Gordon and his interview would bang the drum for Gordon's being sent to Khartoum despite the misgivings of officials like Barrington. Stead would use his popularity as a journalist to create a sort of cult of personality around Gordon as the man poised to save the Sudanese and serve England's purpose there.

In Stead's article for *The Century Quarterly* on Gordon and how his life had prepared him for his mission to the Sudan. The article begins with Gordon's exploits in China twenty-one years earlier where he earned the moniker "Chinese." Stead equates

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<sup>99</sup> Stead, "Are Interviewers a Blessing or a Curse?" in *Idler: an illustrated monthly magazine*, Dec. 1895) pp. 494-496.

the suppression of the rebels under Chung-Wang to the Sudanese and the Mahdi.

Because Gordon was successful in defeating the Chinese he of course could then beat the Sudanese, an equation that pits Gordon as the civilizer of non-white peoples.

Next, Stead pivots to Gordon's 1877 placement as Governor General in the "Soudan, or the Black Country."<sup>100</sup> Egypt is shown as the oppressive state over the Sudanese people. The "Egyptian government...accompanied by the torture of men and the ravishing of women."<sup>101</sup> The Egyptians are presented as Turkish-Circassian predators going after the innocent and childlike Sudanese. Gordon is then shown as the enemy of the corruption and the Egyptian status quo. He quotes Gordon as proclaiming that "Nevermore...will Egypt be able to govern the Soudan in the old Turkish or Circassian fashion after I have resided there long enough to teach the people that they have rights."<sup>102</sup> Under Gordon, the White English Savior, Sudan was improved.

However, in Gordon's view, because Egypt's Khedive did not elect a new Governor-General who would continue Gordon's work. To Stead, "Egypt has lost the Soudan exactly as he predicted."<sup>103</sup> Because the English steady hand had left Khartoum, chaos and corruption was let back in. For Gordon he had "laid the egg...which the Mahdi has hatched." Because Gordon exposed the corruption of the Egyptian rulers, the Mahdi has been able to use that corruption to support his cause and gain followers.

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<sup>100</sup> W.T. Stead, "Chinese Gordon," in *The Century: A Popular Quarterly*, vol. 28, Issue 4, August, 1884.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

All of this history then explains how successful Gordon will be in his new job in the Soudan Campaign in the eyes of Stead. Gordon's main role is to evacuate Sudan and its 20,000 Egyptian troops, employees, native Christians, women, and children. Stead sees the Egyptian government as giving Gordon "discretion" to use troops if need be.<sup>104</sup> Furthermore, Gordon believes that "Her Majesty's Government will give me the support and consideration" in his aim to pacify Khartoum.<sup>105</sup> Stead thus believes that Gordon was the Victorian King Arthur with "the faith of Cromwell, to serve England in the Soudan," who will commit England to an expedition to Khartoum which will lay the foundations of an African India.<sup>106</sup>

The day after the interview appeared papers around the country reprinted portions of the scoop and discussed Gordon's assessment of the strategic situation in the Sudan.<sup>107</sup> In Maryport on 10 January, at a crowded Liberal meeting that was meant to affirm confidence in the leadership of the party and return Liberal MPs to parliament, Sir Wilfred Lawson utilized Gordon's critique to heap condemnation on the premier for entering Egypt in the first place and for disgracefully "enslaving" the Sudan. He pledged "to do everything in his power to get the troops out of Egypt."<sup>108</sup> While it paid tribute to Gordon's expertise by insisting that "everyone ought to pay the fullest attention to any

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<sup>104</sup> Stead.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> *Times* (London), 10 January 1883, 4; *Birmingham Daily Post*, 10 January 1883, 5; *Bristol Mercury*, 10 January 1883, 6; *Dundee Courier*, 10 January 1883, 6; *Leeds Mercury*, 10 January 1883, 8; and *Morning Post*, 10 January 1883, 5.

<sup>108</sup> *Times* (London), 11 January 1884, 7; *Daily News*, 11 January 1883, 4.

opinion expressed with regard to the Egyptian crisis by General Gordon,” the *Daily News* stood firmly behind Gladstone’s decision to withdraw from Sudan and dismissed the persistent accusations that the government’s decisions were continuing to lead to a “loss of prestige.” To that end, the papers stressed to their readers that Gordon’s statements were a warning against abandoning the Sudan rashly, but that they were not, per se, directed against an orderly withdrawal.<sup>141</sup> Concurring with the government’s decision to make Wadi Halfa the southern boundary of Egypt, the *Bristol Mercury* rejected Gordon’s contention that an abrupt extraction was inadvisable when it maintained that the garrison at Khartoum “at present could be withdrawn without danger.”<sup>109</sup> Such responses were not limited to the Liberal papers. Taking issue with a Sheffield politician who advocated sending 30,000 British troops into the Sudan to crush the Mahdi and then marching on to Madagascar to flush out the French, the *Sheffield and Rotherham Independent* declared: “This...is what Tory journalism means when it insists upon the government protecting British interests and the prestige and honour of England in Egypt and the Sudan.” The only sound course of action, the paper determined, was that which the government had already resolved to do, the withdrawal from the South and Western Sudan to Wadi Halfa.<sup>110</sup>

From the perspective of the Conservative and independent presses, which seemingly took Gordon’s warnings more seriously, a military expedition to extract the garrisons or to defend Britain’s position in the Sudan, was simply the responsible and

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<sup>109</sup> *Bristol Mercury*, 10 January 1884, 5.

<sup>110</sup> *Sheffield and Rotherham Independent*, 9 January 1884, 2; *Hampshire Advertiser*, 12 January 1884, 5.

necessary course of action. Claiming that the European papers widely perceived Gladstone's withdrawal from Sudan to be a sign of weakness, the *Hampshire Advertiser* exhaustively argued that it was impossible to conclude otherwise since their suppositions were supported by experts such as Baker and Gordon. The *Advertiser* went on to observe regretfully that in the long run the cabinet's "humiliating policy would hardly settle the crisis."<sup>144</sup>

Although many Conservative papers did not mention Gordon directly, their arguments were consistent with what he had advocated in his interview with Stead. Insisting that the entire country was amazed by the government's "resolution to leave Khartoum, Sinkat, and Tokar to their fate with humiliation and anxiety," the *Standard* hoped that the government would not "tarnish the English name by withholding assistance from the beleaguered garrisons who, with the exercise of a little spirit and the expenditure of a little money, might be—or would have been—rescued from a terrible fate." The *Standard* further contended that, if Britain gave the Sudan to the Mahdi, "there would be no hope of a strong and beneficial administration at Cairo." The paper claimed that with proper governance, "there was no reason why his southern domains should not add strength and dignity to the throne of the khedive."<sup>111</sup> The *Daily Telegraph* similarly charged:

It is necessary to urge that the British government shall spare no effort to rescue the victims of its tardy resolution. There are British soldiers enough in Egypt today to drive

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<sup>111</sup> *Standard*, 11 January 1884, 5.

the Mahdi over the equator if they could only get at him; and yet, in fear as we are of hearing of frightful disasters, they are helpless at Cairo.<sup>112</sup>

The *Morning Post* counseled that “if the six thousand Egyptian troops at Khartoum, with the Europeans in that town...are massacred in attempting to retreat across the desert, the responsibility of the British government for such a catastrophe cannot be disavowed.”<sup>113</sup> It therefore recommended that a force of some four to six thousand Indians and Nubians could affect the safe withdrawal of the Khartoum garrison.<sup>114</sup> The *Morning Advertiser* echoed those remarks stating:

It seems to us that no effort that Her Majesty’s government could make would be too great for securing the safety of the defenders of Khartoum and the remnant of the European population under its protection. If disaster, and possibly massacre, should overtake the column of fugitives from Khartoum there would be an outburst of indignation from the civilized world.<sup>115</sup>

The *Liverpool Courier* posited that “the abandonment of the Sudan may or may not be wise as a political step, [but] the abandonment of the imperiled garrison and the Christian people who imagined that England was ruling Egypt is a crime that will cover the British name with indelible infamy.”<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> *Daily Telegraph*, January 1884, reprinted in *Pall Mall Gazette*, 12 January 1884, 11.

<sup>113</sup> *Morning Post* (London), 11 January 1884, 4.

<sup>114</sup> *Morning Post* (London), 15 January 1884, 4-5.

<sup>115</sup> *Morning Advertiser* (London), January 1884, reprinted in *Pall Mall Gazette*, 11 January 1884, 11.

<sup>116</sup> *Liverpool Courier*, January 1884, reprinted in *Pall Mall Gazette*, 14 January 1884, 11.



That Gordon's statements had an impact on public opinion and policy decisions did not go unnoticed by a London correspondent for the *Hampshire Advertiser* who observed just a few days after Stead's interview appeared in the *Pall Mall Gazette*:

The publication of General Gordon's opinions has done a great deal to strengthen the hands of those who have all along urged the fatality of the abandonment, while the sensitiveness, even of the government itself, to the criticism on its own project, is shown by its contradiction of the suggested abandonment of Souakim [sic]. "Nothing of the kind," we are told by the semi-official journalists. Perhaps we shall be told by and bye [sic] that it is not intended to abandon Khartoum, and then that Berber is to be held, while as to Wady Halfa [sic] that is to be a mere basis of alterations.<sup>117</sup>

Moreover, in contrast to Baker's earlier plea in the *Times* for Gordon's services, the *Pall Mall Gazette's* demand that Gordon be sent to the Sudan provoked a great deal of positive response by the presses. For instance, the London correspondent for the *Sheffield and Rotherham Independent* reported, that

"Chinese" Gordon and his opinions on the Sudan are on the lips of all active politicians here to-night, and the possibility of the government intercepting his projected voyage to the Congo, and sending him to Egypt with extensive powers, is being eagerly discussed.<sup>118</sup>

And while it noted that "some fancy the mere whisper of his name throughout the Sudan would dispel all danger," the correspondent cautioned that "a little less hysterical enthusiasm would be likelier to secure the approval of the general public to any such step being taken."<sup>119</sup> Dismayed by the situation in Egypt, the *Morning Advertiser* likewise wrote, "it is not too much to ask that all England has been looking for the employment of

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<sup>117</sup> *Hampshire Advertiser*, 12 January 1884, 6.

<sup>118</sup> *Sheffield and Rotherham Independent*, 10 January 1884, 6.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*

General Gordon in the present crisis in Egypt.”<sup>120</sup> The *Morning Post* insisted that “surely it is not too late for the government to admit to their councils a man whose advice and cooperation in such a crisis as the present would be of incalculable value.”<sup>121</sup> The *Times* suggested that it was good that Gordon’s resignation had not yet been formally accepted by the War Office, as it was proof that the government recognized “his eminent services and [were] unwilling to lose them.” It optimistically offered that those services might not only be utilized to secure the defense of Egypt but also to effect “the restoration of the khedive’s authority over a part of the Sudan.”<sup>122</sup>

Still apparently intent upon going to the Congo, Gordon’s reaction to the flurry of such articles and demands for his services was to press for Baker’s appointment to the Sudan in a letter to the *Times*.<sup>123</sup> That suggestion, however, was completely ignored by the presses; they wanted Gordon. So too did Hartington, the war secretary, who having favored sending Gordon to the Sudan for some time, redoubled his efforts.<sup>124</sup> With journalistic and political pressure quickly mounting, Gladstone and Granville acquiesced and offered the Sudan mission to Gordon.<sup>125</sup> The aforementioned process by which

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<sup>120</sup> *Morning Advertiser* (London), January 1884, reprinted in *Pall Mall Gazette*, 12 January 1884, 11.

<sup>121</sup> *Morning Post*, (London), 15 January 1884, 5.

<sup>122</sup> *Times* (London), 14 January 1884, 9.

<sup>123</sup> *Times* (London), 14 January 1884, 10.

<sup>124</sup> Holland, 415-17; Hibbert, 284.

<sup>125</sup> John Marlowe, *Mission to Khartoum: the Apotheosis of General Gordon* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1969), 129.

Gordon was sent to the Sudan rapidly went into motion. Only nine days after Stead's article appeared in print, Gordon was on his way to the Sudan.

The significance of Stead's accomplishment in effecting the appointment of Gordon did not go unnoticed by the general public. As one observer expressed to the

*Times*:

The people who first obtained and forced on the attention of ministers the general's opinions were the press, and it is to them that the country owes a tardy recognition of this great man's power, and it is they who must be thanked if England and Egypt are rescued from their difficulties by his courage and gallantry.<sup>126</sup>

Raymond Schults has contended that Stead's efforts marked a truly significant point in the history of journalism. To be sure, this was certainly not the first time the press had influenced a government into take a certain course of action. What made it especially notable, as R. H. Gretton pointed out, was that this was probably the first occasion on which a newspaper set itself, by acting as the organizer of opinion on a particular detail of policy, to change a government's mind at high speed. However strongly newspapers had spoken before this on political subjects, they had not adopted the method of hammering, day in, day out, at a single detail, and turning policy into a catchword."<sup>127</sup> That the press was so successful may have been due, as Gretton suggested, to the government being encouraged that they had been right all along to consider sending Gordon to the Sudan back in December.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> *Times* (London), 23 January 1884, 7.

<sup>127</sup> R. H. Gretton, *A Modern History of the English People*, volume 1 (Boston: Small, 1913), 124.

<sup>128</sup> Gretton, *A Modern History of the English People*, 124; Raymond L. Schults, *Crusader in Babylon: W. T. Stead and the Pall Mall Gazette* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1972), 79.

### 3.2 Press Opinion Shift

Any ambiguity concerning Gordon's orders evaporated when he arrived in Cairo on 24 January. The Egyptian government bestowed upon him the title of governor-general of the Sudan, and he was expressly charged by Baring to

arrange for the withdrawal of the Egyptian garrisons etc. as rapidly as is consistent with (1) the saving of life and so far as possible, property; (2) the establishment of some form of government which will prevent, so far as possible, anarchy and confusion arising out of the withdrawal of the Egyptian troops.<sup>129</sup>

To effect the second part of that commission, Gordon elicited the support of Zubeir Pasha, whom the government had considered as a possible leader prior to Gordon's appointment. He was also the only person, Gordon believed, who had any chance of establishing a responsible temperate government in the wake of an Egyptian exodus. On that basis, Gordon requested that the cabinet approve Zubeir's appointment.<sup>130</sup>

During the nineteenth century it was quite common for non-Western states to enlist the help of European military advisors in what James Glewin calls "defensive developmentalism."<sup>131</sup> Rulers from the East would use these military advisors to copy European administration and rule of law.<sup>132</sup> This allowed Eastern governments like the Ottomans to enact military reforms that allowed for easier mobilization of their native

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<sup>129</sup> Chevenix-Trench, *The Road to Khartoum*, 211. These instructions were later reiterated and confirmed by Gladstone in the Commons on 12 February. *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 3<sup>rd</sup> ser., vol., 284 (1884), col., 274.

<sup>130</sup> Pollock, *Gordon*, 277-78; Chevenix-Trench, *The Road to Khartoum*, 213-14; Elton, *Gordon of Khartoum*, 295.

<sup>131</sup> James, Glewin, "The Modern Middle East," (Oxford, Oxford University Press), 71.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*

populace and put in place a modern population control in the form of discipline and surveillance.<sup>133</sup>

From the moment Gordon left Britain, hardly a day went by without leading articles in the British papers that reported or offered comments on his position.<sup>134</sup> Already successful in effecting Gordon's appointment to the Sudan, the press continued to exert influence. For example, the British government ultimately rejected Gordon's request to install Zubeir because, in the words of Granville, "the public would not tolerate the appointment of Zubeir Pasha."<sup>135</sup> Ostensibly this was because the public opposed the idea of an ex-slaver being named governor-general of the Sudan.<sup>136</sup> Leading the charge against Zubeir was the highly influential British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society. In December, when it was reported that he might be named the commander of an Egyptian army in the Sudan, the Anti-Slavery Society along with the *Times* strongly protested that move on the grounds that, given Zubeir's history of slaving and resisting the authority of the khedive, the appointment would be "improper and dangerous in the highest degree."<sup>137</sup> Three months later, although the *Times* recognized that Gordon ought not leave Khartoum without first establishing a responsible government, it declared that "it is very much open to doubt whether any Government with a notorious

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid, 74.

<sup>134</sup> Elton, *Gordon of Khartoum*, 297, 300.

<sup>135</sup> Cromer, *Modern Egypt*, 2:486.

<sup>136</sup> Chevenix-Trench, *The Road to Khartoum*, 229-37; Elton, *Gordon of Khartoum*, 306-308, 313-15.

<sup>137</sup> *Times* (London), 6 December 1883, 7; 10 December, 1883, 12.

slave-driver at its head can be fitly entrusted to take the place he vacates.”<sup>138</sup> Reiterating its opposition to the rumored appointment, the Anti-Slavery Society firmly urged that the government not “stultify that anti-slavery policy which has so long been the high distinction of England.”<sup>139</sup> That the public was so adamantly against Zubehr, Elton asserted, was not so much a result of a campaign by the press, as it was because the government had not done enough to “enlighten public opinion” about the necessity of the appointment.<sup>140</sup> Queen Victoria, meanwhile, complained to Gladstone at the end of February that “the decisive factor should be ‘the *good and permanent tranquility of Egypt...and not public opinion* HERE which is fickle and changeable.’”<sup>141</sup>

Even while they opposed the appointment of Zubehr, the press and the public were still highly eager to see that Gordon was adequately supported in his mission. As early as January 23 the *Huddersfield Daily Chronicle* had contended that “General Gordon may have great influence among the natives, and he may know more about the Sudan than any other officer, but unless he is well backed up by a strong force of English troops he might as well stay at home as seek to turn by his single arm the blow which threatens the chief town of the Sudan.”<sup>142</sup> In emphasizing the humanitarian aspects of Gordon’s mission in the Sudan and Gordon’s future ambition to stamp out the slave trade

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<sup>138</sup> *Times* (London), 5 March 1884, 9.

<sup>139</sup> *Times* (London), 12 March, 1884, 4; 13 March 1884, 8.

<sup>140</sup> Elton, *Gordon of Khartoum*, 315.

<sup>141</sup> Queen Victoria to Gladstone, quoted in Philip Guevalla, *The Queen and Mr. Gladstone* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1934), 130-31.

<sup>142</sup> *Huddersfield Daily Chronicle*, 23 January 1884, 3.

in the Congo, one clergyman wrote to the *Essex Standard* at the beginning of February that “under these circumstances is it not a national, nay a world-wide duty that we should give him all that we can give him—all that he asks for—our prayers.”<sup>143</sup> On February 11 meanwhile, the *Times* demanded that the government support Gordon adequately:

It is incredible that the strength of the British Empire should not be adequate for such an effort, and, if it be, the obligation upon us to use it for the purpose is dictated alike for humanity and policy...At home, practically all classes and sections are agreed in calling upon the government to recognize and give effect to that responsibility, and ministers will commit an astounding and incomprehensible error if they delude themselves with the notion that a movement of public opinion so powerful and unanimous can be defied even by this phalanx of a parliamentary majority.<sup>144</sup>

Gladstone’s administration was extremely reluctant to offer military support directly to Gordon in the weeks following his departure, a position that left the prime minister and his colleagues open to criticism. To be sure, the Egyptian and British governments did send forces into the Sudan in 1884. At the very time that Gordon and Stewart were making their way to Khartoum, for example, General Valentine Baker led a failed attempt to relieve a garrison at Tokar. Immediately after, at the insistence of Wolseley and the Duke of Cambridge, the commander-in-chief of the army, a second expedition under Major General Sir Gerald Graham set out to relieve Suakin, a location believed vital for effecting a retreat from Khartoum. This latter effort received considerable public support, as evidenced by a meeting held at the Guildhall in London and chaired by the lord mayor on February 15.<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> *Essex Standard*, 9 February 1884, 6.

<sup>144</sup> *Times* (London), 11 February 1885, 9.

<sup>145</sup> Asher, *Khartoum*, 104-5; Elton, *Gordon of Khartoum*, 304-5, 310; *Times* (London), 16 February 1884, 5.

Nevertheless, the Gladstone administration faced a Vote of No Confidence in the Commons four days later, and during the debate on that motion, Hartington spelled out the government's position vis-à-vis Sudan. "We are not responsible," he said, "for the relief or rescue of garrisons in either the western or the southern or the eastern Sudan."<sup>146</sup> He further claimed—disingenuously—that Gordon was not acting on behalf of the British government but rather for the Egyptian government, which had occupied Sudan.<sup>147</sup>

The day before this debate at Westminster, Gordon and Stewart arrived at Khartoum, where Gordon was received as "father" by an adoring and enthusiastic crowd," and he immediately set about the slow process of evacuating the 11,000 Egyptian troops and civilians who resided in Khartoum down the Nile by means of government steamers.<sup>148</sup> When word reached him in early March of London's decision not to approve the appointment of Zubeir, Gordon informed Baring that, while he would proceed in evacuating Khartoum, he could not guarantee the completion of his instructions to leave behind a responsible government without the assistance of Zubeir.

By that time he had come to understand that the Mahdi's movement was not just a response to ineffective and corrupt governance, but that it was a religiously inspired movement, and that as such the Mahdi could not be negotiated into allowing the establishment of an effective government other than one of his own making in the Sudan.

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<sup>146</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 3 ser., vol. 284 (1884), col. 1441. The Government narrowly defeated a censure on a vote of 311 to 262. Ibid., col. 1452.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., col. 1441.

<sup>148</sup> Elton, *Gordon of Khartoum*, 301.



Gordon consequently warned Baring that “if Egypt is to be quiet, the Mahdi must be smashed up.”<sup>149</sup> Conveying to Baring a week later the paramount need for additional support from “the government,” and specifically referencing the necessity of Zubeir’s confirmation, Gordon maintained: “I will do my best to carry out my instructions, but I feel a conviction that I will be caught in Khartoum.”<sup>150</sup>

On March 12 the Mahdists closed the siege around Khartoum—a situation that would last some 320 days. Telegraph communication between Khartoum and Cairo were severed and the only means for Khartoum to communicate with the outside world was by messenger across the desert. The plans for evacuating the city thus came to a halt. Even without the relief of Berber, there remained a window of opportunity for Gordon and a great portion of the Egyptian and Foreign contingent to escape in the early summer while the Nile remained high. Such an expedition, though, was beset with considerable danger and had no certainty of success. Weighing the risks and refusing to leave the Sudan in crisis, Gordon opted to stay in Khartoum, doing his best to secure the city militarily, attempting to ease the ever increasing fiscal and food shortages, and holding up morale.<sup>151</sup> All the while, he awaited the arrival of military relief—that relief, which messages from London during the spring and summer insisted would not be forthcoming—ultimately did come, but it came too late.<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> Gordon to Baring, 26 February 1884, quoted in Chevenix-Trench, *The Road to Khartoum*, 231. Allen, *Gordon and the Sudan*, 282.

<sup>150</sup> Gordon to Baring, 1 March 1884, quoted in Elton, *Gordon of Khartoum*, 314.

<sup>151</sup> Fergus Nicholl, *The Sword of the Prophet: the Mahdi of Sudan and the Death of General Gordon* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 2004) 199-203.

<sup>152</sup> Chevenix-Trench, *The Road to Khartoum*, 233-34.

Throughout the spring and summer of 1884, the cabinet continued not to appreciate fully Gordon's assessment of the impending Mahdi threat to Khartoum specifically or to the Sudan more generally. Upon receiving his warnings and pleas for military resources with which to "smash the Mahdi," the cabinet believed that Gordon was not only advising British military intervention but was announcing his intention to pursue his own course of action and willfully to disobey his orders to withdraw. To be sure, earlier transmissions from Gordon to Baring, which had been forwarded to the government in London, suggested that he was launching military attacks against the Mahdi. In truth, however, such actions were little more than intelligence gathering missions, and Gordon's warning to Baring was nothing more than a predictive assessment of the situation. In addition, messages from Gordon, such as the one that arrived on 30 March, offered reassurance that as of two weeks prior Khartoum was "quite safe."<sup>153</sup> The overall effect was that miscommunication greatly affected the cabinet's, and especially, the prime minister's understanding of Gordon's situation. Thus, holding firm to the belief that Gordon could come out of Khartoum if he wanted, and apprehensive about being seen giving ground to the "jingo," Gladstone resisted sending a military expedition into the Sudan.<sup>154</sup>

That resolve came in the face of stiff pressure to act. On March 25, the queen appealed to Hartington through her private secretary that "Gordon must be trusted and supported...if not for humanity's sake, for the honour of the government and the nation

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<sup>153</sup> *Dundee Courier*, 31 March 1884, 3.

<sup>154</sup> Fraught,, 85-87; Elton, *Gordon of Khartoum*, 312-13; Marlowe, *Mission to Khartoum*, 215-16; Shannon, *Gladstone*, 331-32.

he must not be abandoned.”<sup>155</sup> In fact, Hartington had by then been hearing from Wolseley for nearly seven weeks that a large expedition should be sent to support Gordon, and by early April a narrow majority of the cabinet, including Dilke and Chamberlain, had become convinced that action was required. They could not, however, agree on the size or scope of the relief expedition, and Gladstone and Granville took advantage of these divisions to postpone any decision into the summer months.<sup>156</sup>

As new information from Khartoum became scarce, the press and the general public once again set the pace for government action. Having earlier anticipated that the government would act to relieve Gordon, newspapers increasingly exerted pressure for the government to follow through when that support was not forthcoming. A Cairo correspondent for the *Standard* reported in early April: “Lord Hartington’s declaration that General Gordon would receive assistance, should he claim it, has caused some amusement here. It is well known that General Gordon has already distinctly asked...for English troops, which request has been ignored.”<sup>157</sup> On April 8, in noting the questions posed by Lords Napier and Hardwicke in the House of Lords about preparations for a relief mission of Gordon, the *Dundee Courier* insisted that “it would be well that the government could show that they are prepared for such a contingency as the relief of Gordon and those for whose fate we have made ourselves responsible.”<sup>158</sup> Four days

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<sup>155</sup> Ponsonby to Gladstone, 27 March 1884, quoted in Guevalla, *The Queen and Mr. Gladstone*, 131.

<sup>156</sup> Marlowe, *Mission to Khartoum*, 216-17; Chevenix Trench, 248-52; Shannon, *Gladstone*, 331.

<sup>157</sup> *Standard*, 5 April 1884, 5.

<sup>158</sup> *Dundee Courier*, 8 April 1884, 2.

later, a leading column in the same paper claimed that as Egyptian troops were inherently unreliable, any relief of Gordon would have to be effected by British troops. With that in mind, it maintained that Gordon's reports, which emphasized the security of his position, were likely not completely accurate because Gordon, as an "enthusiast" to the work he was undertaking, was likely to "face dangers lightly."

Arguing that the reports from the *Times*'s correspondent in Khartoum, Frank Power, were accurately conveying the seriousness of the situation, it insisted that "the optimist views which have been continuously pressed...do not accurately outline the situation of Gordon at Khartoum." The paper urged that "if we have any responsibility for Gordon's present position...a more solicitous and anxious view of the situation by our Government would be justified than that which they appear yet to have entertained, or than General Gordon has himself seemed to hold."<sup>159</sup> The *Liverpool Mercury*, meanwhile, took a more sanguinary tone, assuring that "the government has done the best that could be done under the circumstances," and arguing that "Mr. Gladstone and his colleagues may be confidently trusted to take all necessary measures for the rescue of General Gordon."<sup>160</sup>

Not every paper, however, was convinced that a British relief expedition should be sent to Khartoum. For instance, *Reynolds's Weekly Newspaper* acknowledged reports that the situation in Khartoum had become desperate and that Gordon was attempting to solicit Turkish support for the garrison by raising funds from English and American

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<sup>159</sup> *Dundee Courier*, 12 April 1884, 2.

<sup>160</sup> *Liverpool Mercury*, 6 May 1884, 5.

millionaires. Yet it maintained that “even *if* the English government resolved upon the relief of Berber and Khartoum, the sending of a British force is next to impossible.”<sup>161</sup>

To be sure, *Reynolds's Weekly*, like many Liberal presses, was averse to decisions which they saw as furthering a jingoistic fever and imperialistic encroachment. But that had not stopped other Liberal papers, such as the aforementioned *Liverpool Mercury*, from demanding that the government not abandon Gordon. Given that commentators in other papers explained that the hostile climate precluded any immediate relief, it may well have been that *Reynolds's Weekly* was assessing the prospect of an expedition pragmatically.<sup>162</sup>

Further, the paper excused Gladstone for not responding to the opposition's demands for a full explanation of his intentions in Egypt on the grounds that circumstances on the ground there were changing on a daily basis.<sup>163</sup> Having already argued that a relief expedition was impossible, *Reynolds's* subsequently argued that any military expedition into the Sudan to relieve Gordon meant the reconquest of the Sudan, which would be an “utterly worthless” expenditure of blood and treasure.<sup>164</sup>

By the end of April, meanwhile, concerned journalists and members of the public translated their worry into civic action. Promoters eagerly sought to put together a volunteer expedition to relieve Gordon, and private citizens who were interested in volunteering wrote to the press inquiring after the qualifications for service.<sup>197</sup> One

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<sup>161</sup> *Reynolds's Weekly Newspaper*, 27 April 1884, 5. Emphasis is mine.

<sup>162</sup> See James Johnson's letter to the *Times*, 6 May 1884, 11.

<sup>163</sup> *Reynolds's Weekly Newspaper*, 4 May 1884, 3.

<sup>164</sup> *Reynolds's Weekly Newspaper*, 18 May 1885, 1.

concerned citizen suggested to the lord mayor of London, P. N. Fowler, that he should form a “Mansion House Fund for the Relief of General Gordon.” Publicizing his response in the *Standard*, Fowler insisted that as a member of Parliament, he thought that “ministers ought to undertake the rescue, and both Houses would support them in doing so.”<sup>165</sup> However, as the lord mayor of London, he said that he could not agree to the request, as it would bring him into “a collision with the government.”<sup>166</sup>

In a letter to the *Times* on May 6 a self-identified member of the Caledonian United Service Club offered that argued that the government was “paralyzed” to send any relief to Gordon for upwards of five months given the weather conditions in the Sudan. As such, the Government should make it clear to the “warlike tribes” that if harm should come to Gordon or the inhabitants of Khartoum that was “not warranted by the usages of war, no mercy will be shown to the leaders and instigators of such usage when the time arrives for the British army to advance, which it assuredly will, unless submission be made in the interval.”<sup>167</sup>

Following Commons’ Easter recess, Conservatives in the body brought additional pressure to bear by submitting a resolution of censure against Gladstone’s administration:

That this House regrets that the course pursued by Her Majesty’s government has not tended to promote the success of General Gordon’s mission, and that even such steps as are necessary to promote his personal safety are still delayed.<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> *Standard*, 24 April 1884, 2.

<sup>166</sup> *Standard*, 30 April 1884, 5.

<sup>167</sup> *Times*, 6 May 1884, 11.

<sup>168</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 3<sup>rd</sup> ser., vol. 288, (1884), col. 52.

With the debate over censure advertised well in advance and scheduled to begin on 12 May, the motion encouraged a wellspring of anticipatory public activity. On May 8 a well-attended meeting was held at St. James Hall in London, under the auspices of the Patriotic Association, to protest the “abandonment of Gordon.” Denouncing the government’s conduct for being “devoid of principle, moral courage, and statesmanship,” Lord Cadogan insisted that “he mistook the character of the English people if it did not bring down the reprobation and indignation of the whole country.” Condemning Gladstone’s actions for being “dishonourable to the government and discreditable to the country,” Henry Chaplin, the Conservative MP for Mid-Lincolnshire, expressed his hope that a “feeling would be rapidly evoked which would compel the cowardly and caitiff crew who guided the helm of state to-day to take immediate action.”<sup>169</sup>

Two days later, on May 10, a group of 3,000 people—a small number of whom were Liberals—gathered in Manchester, and the organizers of the meeting accused the government of making “Gordon responsible for his own safety.”<sup>170</sup> Appealing to the people to “vindicate the national honour and the national traditions,” and insisting that the government would be held accountable for the “liberty, the safety, and the life of General Gordon,” the Hon. Edward Gibson, member of Parliament for Trinity College, Dublin, advanced a resolution that a “big expedition would have to be sent to the

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<sup>169</sup> *Times*, 9 May 1884, 10; *Pall Mall Gazette*, 9 May 1884, 7.

<sup>170</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 12 May 1884, 7.

Sudan,” and it was overwhelmingly cheered and approved by those in attendance.<sup>171</sup>

That same day, other public demonstrations held in Hanley, Darwen, Folkestone, and Shrewsbury produced similar resolutions that called on the government to relieve Gordon.<sup>172</sup>

Meanwhile, on May 13, the House of Commons debated a motion to censure the Government. In spite of their holding a majority of almost 120 seats, the Liberals survived narrowly on a vote of 303 to 275.<sup>173</sup> Only days later, the *St. James Gazette* reported that the cabinet had resolved to prepare an expedition to Khartoum immediately, and that it was likely to embark by the end of July. The story was subsequently picked up by provincial presses, including the *Dundee Courier* on May 19.<sup>174</sup> As we have seen, Gladstone believed into the early summer that no relief expedition was warranted, a conclusion that was bolstered by reports sent from Gordon in mid-June (and appearing in the press in mid- and late-July) indicating that Khartoum remained safe.<sup>207</sup> Indeed, in early July, the prime minister reassured Sir Henry Gordon that his brother was not in any immediate danger, and that “whenever and if ever, General Gordon is in danger, the whole resources of the government will be employed in his cause.”<sup>175</sup> Confident that if

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<sup>171</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 12 May 1884, 7.

<sup>172</sup> *Pall Mall Gazette*, 12 May 1884, 10.

<sup>173</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 3<sup>rd</sup> ser., vol. 288 (1884), cols., 302-306.

<sup>174</sup> *Dundee Courier*, 19 May 1884, 3. *Morning Post*, 12 May 1884, 5. <sup>207</sup> *Huddersfield Daily Chronicle*, 16 July 1884, 3; 30 July 1884, 3.

<sup>175</sup> Quoted in Lynn MacDonald, ed., *Florence Nightingale on Society and Politics, Philosophy, Science, and Education* (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2003), 471.



messages could get out of Khartoum, then so too could Gordon, Gladstone continuously maintained that there was no need to extract him.<sup>176</sup>

At that very time, however, key members of the cabinet forced the premier's hand. On July 13 Hartington and the Home Secretary Lord Selborne threatened to resign if Gladstone did not agree to send out a relief expedition. Appreciating that those resignations would likely bring down his government, Gladstone presented the Commons with an appropriations bill on August 2 to fund a relief expedition. Three days later Parliament overwhelmingly approved the measure. Only a small cadre of members opposed the bill, and they were led by Henry Labouchere, who insisted that "General Gordon had disobeyed his instructions in not quitting Khartoum, and had forfeited all claims to sympathy and help by his insane desire to 'smash the Mahdi'."<sup>177</sup>

But even while the press welcomed the news that Gladstone had finally decided to act and eagerly anticipated the rescue of Gordon, they remained deeply concerned. The *Huddersfield Daily Chronicle* wrote: "The nation demands that General Gordon shall be relieved from danger which has for so long threatened him, and much will depend upon the manner in which the government set to work to effect the desired result...But although the sum applied for by the government has been willingly granted, it is by no means clear what course will be adopted for carrying out the end in view."<sup>178</sup>

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<sup>176</sup> Shannon, *Gladstone*, 331-32; Fraught, *Gordon: Victorian Hero*, 85-87; Elton, *Gordon of Khartoum*, 312-13; Marlowe, *Mission to Khartoum*, 215-16. Gordon to Baring, 31 July 1884, quoted in *Morning Post*, 28 October 1885, 5.

<sup>177</sup> *Morning Post*, 6 August 1884, 4.

<sup>178</sup> *Huddersfield Daily Chronicle*, 7 August 1884, 2.

If that effort should fail to bring Gordon back safely, the *Chronicle* insisted that the government would have much to answer for.<sup>179</sup> The enormity of the effort to relieve Gordon did not escape the *Morning Post*, which anticipated that “it will be necessary to employ a very numerous force, much greater than could without risk be spared from the present Egypt, and we may, therefore, expect Mr. Gladstone to prepare the House for the dispatch of further drafts from either England or India.”<sup>180</sup> Indeed, despite Gladstone’s willingness to move an expedition to save Gordon, the press remained skeptical. Noting that nearly everyone ridiculed Gladstone’s unwavering insistence that Gordon could withdraw from Khartoum any time he wished, and recognizing that his position was not likely to change, the *Huddersfield Daily Chronicle* offered that perhaps Gordon could set Gladstone straight upon his return to Britain.<sup>181</sup> As it was, Gladstone remained in no hurry to move, as a further three weeks passed before Wolseley was officially named the expedition’s commander on 26 August.<sup>182</sup>

### 3.3 Martyrdom of Gordon

Well-documented by the London and provincial presses, the delays and set-backs that beset the two columns were well known to the British public. Fears that General Wolseley’s columns would not reach Khartoum in time to save Gordon were temporarily assuaged, when, in the first week of February, papers such as the *Times*, the *Cornishman*,

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<sup>179</sup> *Huddersfield Daily Chronicle*, 7 August 1884, 2.

<sup>180</sup> *Morning Post*, 5 August 1884, 4.

<sup>181</sup> *Huddersfield Daily Chronicle*, 7 August 1884, 2.

<sup>182</sup> Asher, *Khartoum*, 164-65; Chevenix-Trench, *The Road to Khartoum*, 256.

and the *Derby Telegraph* erroneously speculated that Colonel Wilson had been in Khartoum for a number of days.<sup>183</sup> These were of course ultimately proven to be unsubstantiated rumors.<sup>184</sup> In the case of *Punch*, on February 7 the paper grandly but mistakenly portrayed Wolseley greeting Gordon in Khartoum with the caption “At Last!” It then corrected its most unseemly error with a depiction of a grieving Britannia outside the walls of Khartoum with the caption “Too Late!”<sup>185</sup>

The country descended into mourning with the news that Khartoum had fallen. The *Huddersfield Daily Chronicle* observed that “since the arrival of the news of the fall of Khartoum, but little else has been talked about.”<sup>186</sup> Weeks later, on March 13, crowds attended memorial services for Gordon in London, Manchester, and Durham.<sup>187</sup> Public dismay at the fall of Khartoum led to speculation about who was accountable for the disaster. The two names which immediately rose to the surface were Gladstone and Wolseley. In his defense, Gladstone and his supporters in and outside of Parliament attempted to deflect responsibility from the government by blaming the military and specifically Wolseley. They emphasized that nearly two months passed between the time of Wolseley’s commission and the point at which the expedition finally began heading

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<sup>183</sup> *Times* (London), 5 February 1885, 6; *Cornishman*, 5 February 1885, 6; *Derby Telegraph*, 5 February 1885, 4.

<sup>184</sup> *Pall Mall Gazette*, 5 February 1885, 8-9; *Edinburgh Evening News*, 5 February 1885, 3; *Nottingham Evening Post*, 5 February 1885, 3.

<sup>185</sup> *Punch*, 7 February 1885, 66; 14 February 1885, 78. See images 2.1 and 2.2 at the end of the chapter.

<sup>186</sup> *Huddersfield Daily Chronicle*, 14 February 1884, 5.

<sup>187</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 14 March 1885, 20; *Manchester Courier and Lancaster Guardian*, 14 March 1885, 4; *Hampshire Advertiser*, 18 March 1885, 3; *Pall Mall Gazette*, 13 March 1885, 8.

up the Nile. In addition, those who deflected blame from the prime minister also focused on Wolseley's insistence to move up the Nile instead of taking the overland approach. For example, in his contemporary history of the Egyptian campaigns, Royle argued that even though Wolseley's force might well have had to fight along the Suakin to Berber to Khartoum route, that passage would still have been shorter and taken less time than the longer river route.<sup>188</sup> Wolseley and his supporters refuted the charges, and directed the blame back on Gladstone. If Gladstone had acted promptly, Wolseley argued, the delays incurred in preparation and in executing the relief notwithstanding, he would have arrived in Khartoum in plenty of time to save the besieged officer.<sup>189</sup>

In general, those who had favored sending a relief expedition long before it was authorized tended to side with Wolseley. In letters to the independent-minded *Huddersfield Daily Chronicle*, two troubled citizens eulogized the fallen soldier thusly:

#### ON HEARING OF GORDON'S DEATH

Brave Gordon—gone—  
The Arab spear hath pierced his breast,  
And freed his soul; while ever and anon  
England asked why her foremost son should rest  
Forsaken—pitilessly left to shift as best he might,  
What days of toil, what nights of troubled rest  
Were his. Khartoum his prison, treachery lurking there,  
A multitude to feed. Sustained by prayer  
And faith in God, he need his mighty skill;  
Mounting each crested billow as it rose,

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<sup>188</sup> Royle, *The Egyptian Campaigns*, 315.

<sup>189</sup> Modern scholars remain focused and highly opinionated as to the reasons for the expedition's failure. For example, Thomas Pakenham argues that Wolseley was severely overconfident in his ring's own abilities, dismissive of the danger that Gordon was in, and committed serious mistakes that ultimately doomed the mission. Pakenham, *The Struggle for Africa*, 233-34. More recently, the circumstances of Gordon's temperament in death became the subject of a 1993 article in the *Times* and a rebuttal letter to the editor. *Times* (London), 16 July 1993, 6; 24 July 1993, 13.

Almost like Him who uttered, "Peace be still."  
 And twice six months he kept at bay his foes,  
 With soldiers who had nothing save the name;  
 Intent to his duty, and the fame Of his dear  
 country to uphold. Oh shame!  
 Thrice shame! on those who let him die.  
 Britannis, blush and weep. That craven policy, Whispering  
 expense, delay, and peace hypocrisy,[sic] Should sacrifice thy  
 noblest, bravest son.  
 Go write his epitaph. Say here lies one  
 Of matchless valour, infinite resource;  
 A lion's heart, yet gentle as the wind  
 Which play's on summer's eve; his force Of mind,  
 sustained by Him, whom well he loved.  
 And I—you, I!—forsook him, left him e'en to die.  
 Amid a scene of savage butchery.

W. H. G.<sup>190</sup>

#### GORDON

Is this the land of Nelson,  
 The land of Pitt and Clive,  
 The land of Cromwell, Raleigh,  
 Or Palmerston's Old Hive?...

Praying that they would send him [Gordon]  
 Only three thousand men, To  
 unbeleaguered Berber,  
 To smash the tiger's den.

But their good faces lengthened,  
 And their small hearts stood still,  
 They blankly gazed and blankly said,  
 "Twill spoil our Budget Bill."...

When school boys read the story,  
 The indelible shame Will fill their souls with loathing,  
 Their little hearts with flame...

Some glow of pride will mingle  
 With shams upon each cheek,  
 And their little hearts will open,  
 And their little tongues shall speak.

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<sup>190</sup> *Huddersfield Daily Chronicle*, 14 February 1885, 7.

And with their wreaths they'll crown him,  
The hero of Khartoum,  
And will throw the names of those men  
Into history's lumber-room.

J. M. R.<sup>191</sup>

Noting that the continental presses overwhelmingly condemned Gladstone for failing to act, the *Standard* argued that the government had had no case against the censure motion the previous spring.<sup>192</sup> On February 26 the *Huddersfield Daily Chronicle* reminded its readers of those who had “abandoned Gordon” by listing the local MPs who had sided with Gladstone during that vote.<sup>193</sup> Deriding Gladstone’s failure to act, the public reversed the acronym of his nickname “Grand Old Man” G.O.M. to read M.O.G. “Murderer of Gordon.”<sup>194</sup> With criticism against Gladstone mounting, in early June the Tory opposition moved against the prime minister in opposing his Customs and Inland Revenue Bill. Although the measure was not a formal vote of censure, as Sir Michael Hicks-Beach noted, the vote “carried with it the life or death of the government” and had thus had the effect of a vote of no confidence. On that occasion, Gladstone was unexpectedly and narrowly defeated, by a vote of 264 to 252.<sup>195</sup>

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<sup>191</sup> *Huddersfield Daily Chronicle*, 14 February 1885, 7.

<sup>192</sup> *Standard*, 13 February 1885, 7; 24 February 1885, 4.

<sup>193</sup> *Huddersfield Daily Chronicle*, 26 Feb 1885, 4.

<sup>194</sup> Shareen Blair Brysac and Karl E. Meyer, *Kingmakers: The Invention of the Modern Middle East* (New York: Norton, 2008), 46-47.

<sup>195</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, vol. 298, c. 1498, 1511-1514. The success of this vote was largely due to a strategic move by the Irish vote, led by Charles Stewart Parnell, to support the Conservative opposition to Gladstone. As had been the case when they had joined the Conservatives in attempting to censure Gladstone back in February 1884 over his Sudan policy, the decision of the Irish MPs to oppose the Liberal government in June 1885 was almost certainly an effort to strategically play one party against the other in order to advance their own interests. Lyons, *Charles Stewart Parnell*, 276; John Morley, *The Life of William Ewart Gladstone*, volume 3, (London: Macmillan, 1903), 200-201.

Gladstone duly resigned on 9 June and Lord Salisbury began the first and shortest of his three governments.<sup>196</sup>

The public's fixation with Gordon since Stead's piece in the *Pall Mall Gazette* vaulted the general in death to martyr status. The *Leeds Mercury* eulogized him thusly, "that he should have closed his noble life of heroic effort by the martyr's death will strike all among us with a sense of fitness."<sup>197</sup> Middlesbrough's *Daily Gazette* predicted that "his country will cherish his memory. His name will live in history; his laurels will not fade."<sup>198</sup> And the *Suffolk Mirror* insisted that "Gordon still lives in the hearts of men throughout the civilised world, and whilst time lasts, he will stand."<sup>199</sup> Likewise, at a well-attended meeting of the Christian Mission Society in late March, the Earl of Cairns paid homage to Gordon's career as a humanitarian and concluded his remarks: "if these things constituted the true type of a Christian missionary, and if a violent death cheerfully met and welcomed in the midst of life constituted a martyr's death, then it was beyond all doubt that that great and noble hero whose loss England and the world were now deploring...was both missionary and martyr."<sup>200</sup>

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<sup>196</sup> Jenkins, *Gladstone*, 514-16.

<sup>197</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 12 February 1885, 2.

<sup>198</sup> *Daily Gazette* (Middlesbrough), 12 February 1885, 2.

<sup>199</sup> *Suffolk Mirror*, 21 February 1885, 4.

<sup>200</sup> *Times* (London), 26 March 1885, 3.

In keeping with a long tradition of recognizing military and imperial heroes, the country intended to memorialize Gordon. Within weeks of the general's death, the lord mayor of London formed a committee of influential persons, including members of the royal family and government officials.<sup>201</sup> After deliberating on the matter for several weeks, the committee determined to open a school for orphaned boys and raised almost £16,000 in two months. On May 1 1886, the Gordon Boys' Home held its opening festival.<sup>202</sup> Meanwhile, Gordon memorials were placed both in St. Paul's Cathedral and at Westminster Abbey. Adorning the cenotaph at St. Paul's were lines composed specially by Alfred Lord Tennyson:

Warrior of God, man's friend, not here below,  
But somewhere dead, far in the waste Soudan;  
Thou livest in all hearts, for all men know  
This earth hath borne no simpler, nobler man.<sup>203</sup>

In mid-March the citizens of Southampton urged the commissioning of a statue to their fallen son.<sup>204</sup> In April, at the initiation of the Marquis of Huntly, family and members of clan Gordon eagerly proposed that a Scottish memorial to Gordon be erected in Aberdeen.<sup>205</sup> That same month, the citizens of Liverpool established the Liverpool

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<sup>201</sup> *Daily News* (London), 24 February 1885, 3.

<sup>202</sup> *Daily News* (London), 16 March 1885, 2; *Daily News* (London), 10 May 1885, 6; *Times* (London), 5 May 1885, 9; 1 May 1886, 14.

<sup>203</sup> *Times* (London), 4 March 1885, 13; 7 May 1885, 6; 9 April 1885, 8.

<sup>204</sup> Miles Taylor, "Charles Gordon: Reluctant Son of Southampton," in *Southampton: Gateway to the British Empire*, ed. Miles Taylor (London: I. B. Tauris, 2007), 87-89.

<sup>205</sup> *Aberdeen Journal*, 4 April 1885, 3. Completed in 1888, the statue to Gordon was placed outside the gates to what was then Robert Gordon College (now Robert Gordon University).



Gordon's Working Lads Institute.<sup>206</sup> In 1888 a contemplative statue of Gordon, was erected in Trafalgar Square, in the company of two of the country's other great martyrs, Admiral Lord Nelson and General Sir Henry Havelock.<sup>207</sup> Two years later a statue depicting Gordon sitting astride a camel was erected outside the regimental headquarters of the Corps of Royal Engineers in Chatham.<sup>208</sup>

For several years 26 January did not pass without a newspaper noting that it was the day on which Gordon had died in Khartoum. In 1888, for instance, the *Times* claimed that he was still very much in the hearts and minds of the British public, and the paper drew a biting contrast between the general sentiment and political actors:

Yesterday many thousands of Englishmen, and those especially who place patriotism above party, were saddened by the memory of an event scarcely, we believe, to be paralleled in the annals of the nation...History will judge between him and those who, for the purpose of an ignoble ambition, gambled with that noble life. It is rather significant, however, of the levity of modern politics to find that among all the orators who are deafening the public ear with their speeches scarcely one was mindful of this solemn anniversary...It would be well, to be sure, for the Gladstonian party if that oblivion were complete, but notwithstanding the silence of politicians on both sides, the nation is not wholly forgetful of Gordon's devotion and Gordon's fate.<sup>209</sup>

On 26 January 1891, a short "in memorium" notice dedicated to Gordon appeared in the *Times* for the last time.<sup>210</sup> Even so, Gordon was hardly forgotten. In 1899, in the

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<sup>206</sup> *Liverpool Mercury*, 6 May 1885, 8.

<sup>207</sup> Rodney Mace, *Trafalgar Square: Emblem of Empire* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1976), 90, 107-108, 125-6; Ian F. W. Beckett, *The Victorians at War* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 23.

<sup>208</sup> *Times* (London), 20 May 1890, 8. A copy of this statue was also erected outside of the Governor's Palace in Khartoum. It was subsequently removed in 1958 and placed outside Gordon's School in Woking.

<sup>209</sup> *Times* (London), 27 January 1888, 9.

<sup>210</sup> *Times* (London), 26 January 1891, 1.

aftermath of Kitchener's victory at Omdurman and in the course of delivering a sermon on Matthew 20, the Bishop of Peterborough resurrected the memory of Gordon stating: "Thank God for the Presence in His Church has touched our nation's life and worked for righteousness—only the last few years have given us proof of it. The hero of the people's hearts has been the man, Charles Gordon, whose heroic death and Christian life won men's esteem. It was to honour him that in the very flush of victory our soldiers bared their heads to join their intercessions—Anglicans, Romans, Presbyterians—and gave this tribute of their honour to a righteous man."<sup>211</sup> And, in 1933, on the centenary of Gordon's birth, memorial services were held at St. Paul's Cathedral and in Trafalgar Square.<sup>212</sup>

Even while the press ceased printing memorial notices, a long-term recognition and interest in Gordon persisted. The degree to which imperialism was a fixture of Victorian society is evidenced through Victorian popular literature. While that issue will be examined more substantially in chapter 5, it is nevertheless fitting at this point to comment briefly on as to how the treatment of Gordon illustrated that wider narrative.

Whereas George Birkbeck Hill's work on Gordon's early career in the Sudan failed to generate or receive much interest before he was reassigned to the Sudan in January 1884, in the aftermath of Gordon's death, the work subsequently underwent several editions.<sup>213</sup> In addition to the numerous contemporary works about Gordon cited

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<sup>211</sup> *Times* (London), 11 October 1899, 5.

<sup>212</sup> *Times* (London), 28 January 1933, 11-12; 30 January 1933, 15.

<sup>213</sup> Pollock, *Gordon*, 268; George Birkbeck Hill, *Colonel Gordon in Central Africa*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (London: Thos. de la Rue, 1885), xi.

earlier, Colonel (later Major General) Sir William F. Butler published a Gordon biography in February 1889 that became a bestseller. It was subsequently reprinted in March 1889, 1891, 1892, and 1893. After public interest in the Sudan was reinvigorated by Britain's reentry into the Sudan in 1896, the work went through additional printings in 1897, 1898, 1899, and thereafter in 1901, 1903, 1904, 1907, 1913, 1920, and 1921.<sup>214</sup> Speaking to the general proliferation of such works, the *Leeds Mercury* observed in 1896 that "of the making of books concerning General Gordon there seems to be no end."<sup>215</sup>

Extending beyond works that were solely dedicated to Gordon, other writings included noticeable references to the imperial martyr. For instance, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle subtly rounded out the Victorian attributes of his famed detective, Sherlock Holmes, by mentioning that an engraving of the late general hung on the wall of his apartments at 221b Baker Street.<sup>216</sup> Later when Conan Doyle was forced by popular demand to resurrect Holmes from an untimely death at Reichenbach Falls and fill in the missing years, the author wove into the detective's hiatus a fact-finding mission to Khartoum on behalf of the Foreign Office.<sup>217</sup> Furthermore, the Sudan, Khartoum, and Gordon also found a place in K. and Hesketh Pritchard's 1903 serial "By Tammers"

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<sup>214</sup> Butler, *Charles George Gordon* (London: Macmillan, 1892); Publication information for subsequent printings of Butler's biography derived from search of Google Books. Subsequent publications were complete reprints of the original 1889 edition, and were published without a preface revised or otherwise.

<sup>215</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 26 October 1896, 8.

<sup>216</sup> Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, "The Cardboard Box," *Strand Magazine*, 5 (January 1893): 62.

<sup>217</sup> Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, "The Empty House," *Strand Magazine*, 26 (October, 1903): 368.

Camp Fire” which appeared in *Strand Magazine* from June 1903 to November 1904.<sup>218</sup>

To those ends, the public’s longstanding interest in Gordon and his elevation to martyr status was certainly cemented by the circumstances of his death and had much to do with the fact that the public’s connection with Gordon had been established and encouraged by the press during the year-long siege. In this way, as John Wolfe demonstrated, Gordon had much in common with the famed explorer David Livingston, whose exploits, thanks to the efforts of Sir Henry Morton Stanley, were also fresh in the public’s mind at the time of his death.<sup>219</sup>

### 3.4 Conclusion

The advent of New Journalism under the auspices of W.T. Stead allowed for a more active press in regards to foreign policy. Stead’s push for Gordon to be Britain’s man in Khartoum sparked debate in the press on Britain’s role in the Sudan which mostly fell into a liberal versus conservative divide, with the liberal press mostly in support of Gladstone’s cautious approach to imperialism, and the conservatives antagonistic. It became hard to separate Charles Gordon from the Sudan as events evolved from the recruitment of Gordon, to a relief of Gordon, to a public mourning of Gordon. Thus, an image of a heroic martyr became associated with Gordon, sparking romantic imagination within the public discourse in newspapers. This romantic imaginary surrounding Gordon

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<sup>218</sup> K. and Hesketh Pritchard, “By Tammer’s Camp Fire,” *Strand Magazine* 26 (October, 1903), 165, 438.

<sup>219</sup> John Wolfe, *Great Deaths: Grieving, Religion, and Nationhood in Victorian and Edwardian Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 138. Subsequently, Hall Caine’s “The White Christ,” dealt with fictional exploits of the British army in post-Omdurman Egypt and the Sudan. Hall Caine, “The White Christ,” *Strand Magazine* (December, 1908 – November, 1909). <sup>269</sup> Churchill, *The River War*, 77-83.

would also take hold around the Sudan Campaign as well as literature, journals, and artifacts fueled the connection between the Empire and colonial adventure.

## CHAPTER 4. ROMANCE AND PLUNDER

If journalists created the frenzy to send Gordon to the Sudan, then popular imagination was fed as well by the literature, journals, and material culture read and viewed by the British public. Literature reflected the growing attitudes of racial politics and reinforced the role of education in creating a masculine ruling imperial class. Rudyard Kipling and Henry Newbolt used the Sudan Campaign's failure to sell an imperial fantasy and the notion of the British stiff upper lip. By contrast, the imperial critic Hilarie Belloc would use the folly of the Sudan Campaign and other African adventures to paint a picture of an immoral imperialism that went against notions of a "Little England."

As fictional accounts sparked the imaginations of readers, soldier recollections and journals provided an up close personal adventure. The journal of Charles Gordon was propaganda established to create a martyr. Soldier and adventure journals allowed for the plundering (both actual and literary) of the Sudan in a conquest of the Sudan through the print public. Meanwhile soldiers would bring back artifacts as physical manifestations of the romantic imperial imagination.

This chapter argues that these literary and visual representations of the Sudan within the wider public became the avenue where ideas about the role of Britain in Africa could play out. Was it good? Or was it an unnecessary evil? Imperial values became intertwined with national moral character and virtue. British culture in the late Victorian era started to treat the Empire as a central location for romance, as critical voices emerged to

challenge the choir of cheers for the imperial enterprise. Gordon's journals became a symbol of martyrdom as well as public moralizing. Plundering, thus, also became a way to assert the moral character of the nation.

#### 4.1 Literature

##### Kipling

Rudyard Kipling is often referred to as the “poet of Empire” for his enthusiastic cheerleading for the British Empire. Known more for poems like “The White Man’s Burden” and the novel *The Jungle Book*, Kipling early in his career as journalist wrote his first novel *The Light That Failed* in 1891. The novel would showcase the imperial themes of war and Empire that Kipling would become known for, but in the context of the Sudan Campaign.

The story sees the protagonist Dick Helder in a sort of bildungsroman set in late Victorian London. Poor Dick, mocked and ridiculed for his lack of material possessions as a child seeks, out enrichment through personal improvement. This improvement sees Kipling’s protagonist uplift himself through his ability to paint. His artistic abilities itself lend to his job as an illustrator for London newspapers during the 1885 relief of Gordon in Khartoum. It is in the Sudan where Dick meets the special correspondent of the fictional paper *Central Southern Syndicate*, Gilbert Torpenhow. The two men forge a close and intimate friendship, and Torpenhow promotes the work of Dick. But at the end of the novel both Torpenhow and Dick will have returned to the Sudan. Torpenhow's return is framed as a patriotic and honorable act, while a blind Dick’s return is an act of a

man being reunited with his true (though chaste) love in Torpenhow and showing his chivalric honor. Thus, connecting masculinity and war within a homosocial bond.

Masculinity and warfare are inseparable in the reading of *The Light That Failed*. Kipling strove to use war as way to show the life of action which the hero had strayed away from.<sup>220</sup> The death of Dick in the Sudan, as a glorious sacrifice, was mirrored in reality by the death of General Gordon. The 1884-5 Expedition to the Sudan under General Wolseley, to relieve the besieged Gordon at Khartoum, pre-dated the novel by some five years. The Sudan campaign, as Imperial and military history was clearly in the forefront of Kipling's mind during the gestation of *The Light That Failed*.

The Anglo-Indian community, of which Kipling was a member, reacted with enormous shock to the news of Gordon's fate, and we may be pretty sure that Kipling reacted in the same way, given his likely admiration for Gordon as a man of action and a hero of the Empire. Public opinion in Britain blamed the Government, particularly Gladstone, for failing to relieve the siege. As Kipling described in his novel "it was above all things necessary that England at breakfast should be amused and thrilled and interested, whether Gordon lived or died."<sup>221</sup> Writing after the events at Khartoum had unfolded, Kipling's somewhat satirical sentiment showed the level of interest that the

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<sup>220</sup> Eric Solomon, *English Literature in Transition: 1889-1920*, (Berkeley, University of California Press), 147.

<sup>221</sup> Rudyard Kipling, *The Light That Failed*, (New York: R.F. Femmo & Co, 1898), 28.



public had in Gordon. His struggle was constantly on their minds, and checking to see if any news of the stranded man had arrived was a priority.<sup>222</sup>

The events, described in Chapter II of *The Light that Failed*, and their background influence the whole novel, up to and including the final two chapters. Gordon himself has only a few brief mentions, but he seems to cast his unacknowledged shadow over the novel's action. The most striking fact about the war sequences is that Kipling had *never* been on a battlefield, let alone in the Sudan campaign. It was the Boer War that later gave him his first experience of the real thing. He had only visited Egypt for four days in Port Said at the age of sixteen, during the 1882 Egyptian conflict.<sup>223</sup> So the vivid description of war came from Kipling's own imagination enhanced by reading numerous eye-witness accounts of the conflict. It is not only the descriptions of action and scene that impress, but the attention Kipling gives to the details of military resourcing, tactics and logistics.

The incident with Torpenhow gauging out the Arab soldier's eye as he grapples with the soldier, reaching for the man's face, clearly in understandable desperation. Soon after, he wipes a thumb on his trousers; "his upturned face lacked an eye."<sup>224</sup> Even the battlefield carnage is reduced to a single charged sentence "the ground beyond was a

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<sup>222</sup> John O. Springfield, "Up Guards and At Them!: British imperialism and popular art, 1880-1914," in *Imperialism and Popular Culture*, ed. John Mackenzie, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986), 56.

<sup>223</sup> Harry Ricketts, *Kipling: A Life*, (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 54.

<sup>224</sup> Kipling, 28.

butcher's shop.”<sup>225</sup> Thus, the description of violence with its vividness, stems from the violence the everyday reader of newspapers throughout the Anglo communities in the empire would have been familiar with. The press had made the wider public familiar with the physicality of war.

In the late Victorian Era, popular fiction was used by publishers to experiment with narrative and new and more sensational fiction. This allowed for unproven authors, like Kipling, to easily get published.<sup>226</sup> The American publisher J.B. Lippincott was a market leader in such ventures, issuing a monthly magazine simultaneously in New York, London and Melbourne (using Ward, Lock, Bowden & Co. as the publisher in Great Britain and Australia), with a complete novelette by a reputed author in every number.<sup>227</sup>

As *The Light that Failed* played out each week in newspapers, Torpenhow's career as a war correspondent becomes that more important. In the late Victorian era, the war correspondent became a central player in the romanticization of the empire. The journalist was not just relaying the story back home to the readers, but was part of the action, becoming the central protagonist in his own adventure novel. This “novelization” of journalism created a spectacle of images and drama for readers safely back at home in

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<sup>225</sup> Ibid.

<sup>226</sup> P.J. Keating, *The Working Classes in Victorian Fiction*, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul), 142.

<sup>227</sup> J. Stuart Freeman, *Towards a Third Century of Excellence: An Informal History of the J. B. Lippincott Company on the Occasion of Its Two-Hundredth Anniversary*, (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1992).

Britain.<sup>228</sup> This spectacle made its way in literature as the special correspondent became the protagonist in novels by the usual suspects of Imperial novelization: Rider Haggard, Joseph Conrad, and of course Kipling. The fictional and real special correspondents, like Torphenhow in *The Light that Failed* or the real Archibald Forbes of the *Times* became stand-ins for Imperialism.<sup>229</sup> Thus, *The Light that Failed* represented the alignment of reporting and fiction as promoting ideas and images of empire.

Kipling also used the Sudan as a subject in his 1892 poem “Fuzzy-Wuzzy.” The title of the poem refers to the nickname that the British soldiers gave to the Beja soldiers who fought on the side of the Mahdi in reference to puffy hairstyles worn by the Beja. These soldiers were armed with swords and breech-loaded rifles (spoils from battle with the Egyptian and their own service with Egypt). However, where *The Light That Fails* revels in Empire and the Englishmen’s honorable role in it, “Fuzzy-Wuzzy” promotes the bravery of the African soldiers, though in typically Kiplingesque patronizing affect.

Because of the white dominance in England, Victorians considered themselves the most civilized race, and thus reinvented conceptions of race to create social boundaries with non-white races. Advocates of Disraeli's imperialist foreign policies justified these boundaries by invoking a paternalistic and racist theory (founded in part upon popular but erroneous generalizations derived from Darwin's theory of evolution) which saw Imperialism as a manifestation of what Kipling would refer to as "the white

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<sup>228</sup> Andrew Griffiths, *The New Journalism, The Imperialism and the Fiction of Empire, 1870-1900*, (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015), 13-14.

<sup>229</sup> Griffiths, 101.

man's burden."<sup>230</sup> The implication, of course, was that the Empire existed not for the benefit — economic or strategic or otherwise — of Britain itself, but in order that primitive peoples, incapable of self-government, could, with British guidance, eventually become civilized.<sup>231</sup>

The poem was first published in the Scots Observer on March 15, 1890, and would later be published as part of the 1892 *Barrack Room Ballads*.<sup>232</sup> Specifically, the poem regales the fighting between the British and Mahdist forces during the ill-fated Gordon Relief Expedition. The expeditionary force made up of British, Indian, and Australian forces, were sent to destroy the Mahdi and put in place a more orderly government. By March 22 British troops, who were building a defensive compound at Tofrek, were attacked by Beja tribesmen under Osman Digna.<sup>233</sup> Both the British and the Beja tribesman experienced heavy casualties, however, but the British government under the Liberal Government effectively lost interest and the Early Campaign dissipated by the summer of 1885.

The Beja tribesman, or Fuzzy-Wuzzies, who had produced such heavy casualties for the British were of the Hadendowa, Amarar, and Bisharin tribes. The nickname of Fuzzy-Wuzzy was a deliberate attempt to patronize a ferocious enemy (and a less well armed one at that) since it was clear that "without a doubt these Arabs are the fiercest,

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<sup>230</sup> Ricketts, 233.

<sup>231</sup> Hall, 42-47.

<sup>232</sup> Ricketts, 162.

<sup>233</sup> Robert O. Collins, ed. *Historical Problems of Imperial Africa*, (Princeton: Marcus Weiner Publishers, 1994), 7-56; Edward Spiers, *The Victorian Soldier in Africa*, 99

brave, daring, and unmerciful race of men in the world."<sup>234</sup> Though the attributing of bravery to the Arab soldier could be seen by some in a positive light, the coupling of the praise in the poem with the racially demeaning nickname of "Fuzzy-Wuzzy" reaffirms the power relationship between the Arab and the British. Kipling's soldier acknowledges the awesome qualities of the tribesman, but diminishes them even though they broke the British square (combat formation).

If a square was broken or penetrated the force could be wiped out, causing confusion from the hand-to-hand combat that usually ensued. A more linear formation left the British less exposed to the risk of chaos. However, the use of a square was beneficial when a small force was in operation. The use of the square was evident in the battles of El Teb, Tamai, Abu Klea, and Kerbikan. The ferocity of the attacks by the Sudanese would often break these squares creating hand to hand combat which evened the playing field between the two forces. However, despite this perceived equity, the "Fuzzy-Wuzzy" as Africans would never be equal to that of the brave British soldier for Kipling, and would have to be taught by the grown up school boy of Henry Newbolt's "Vitaī Lampada."

Henry Newbolt

"Play up! play up! and play the game!" So says the fictional soldiers in the fields of Sudan and the young boys on the playing fields of the British public school in Henry

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<sup>234</sup> Rudyard Kipling, "Fuzzy Wuzzy." *A Victorian anthology, 1837–1895; selections illustrating the editor's critical review of British poetry in the reign of Victoria*, ed. Edmund Clarence Stedman, (Cambridge: Riverside Press, 1895, 595.

Newbolt's poem "Vitaī Lampada." Newbolt's poem, which can be translated as "Torches of Life," was a celebration of the role of the public school boy in the Empire. Written in 1892, the poem juxtaposes the schoolboy match of cricket with that of the soldier on the battlefield during the Gordon Expedition.

During the nineteenth century sport in the public school was seen as an important factor of a boy's education. It was seen a sort of social control in order to keep boys out of trouble, but also to teach them discipline and teamwork. The Industrial Revolution expanded the middle class, and created a demand for privately funded education.<sup>235</sup> With the founding of these new schools, sport became a central component as it was seen as essential in the training of boys into gentlemen- a colonial elite- charged with the administration of the empire.<sup>236</sup> Thus, the school boy as officer in the Imperial army takes his lessons from the school field of play to the battle field.<sup>237</sup>

These school boys would have been the audience for "Vitaī Lampada." The poem would have been part of the nineteenth century indoctrination of boys of a certain persuasion (read upper middle class) of certain virtues necessary for citizenship in the Empire. As the British red grew on the global map, the qualities of the so-called "stiff-upper lip" were needed for the future officers of the Empire.<sup>238</sup> "Vitaī Lampada" or

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<sup>235</sup> David Turner, *The Old Boys: The Decline and Rise of the Public School*, (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2015), 92.

<sup>236</sup> Richard Holt, *Sport and the British: A Modern History*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 204.

<sup>237</sup> Newbolt himself was an old boy of Clifton College.

<sup>238</sup> Jenny Holt, *Public School Literature: Civic Education and the Politics of Male Adolescence*, (New York: Routledge, 2016), 232.

“Torches of Life” like Kipling’s “If” were emblematic of this moralizing. The public school boy would become the Colonial and Imperial figures who, like Charles Gordon, would supposedly sacrifice themselves in service to the Crown.

The first stanza concerns a cricket match in which it is getting late and the boys are starting to wrap up their match. “An how to play, and the las man in.” The last boy up is not playing for the “ribboned coat” given for achievement in sport, or for the glory of a “season’s fame.” Instead, the school boy is batting for the respect of his Captain who implores of him to “Play up! Play up! And play the game!”<sup>239</sup>

The second stanza brings the reader to the Sudan *in media res* of the Battle of Abu Klea. The British square has been broken and is now a “wreck.” The machine gun has jammed, the Colonel (probably referring to Fredrick Gustavus Burnaby) has been killed. The defeated unnamed officer is rallied by the voice of his old school chum, who uses the rallying cry of “play up! And play the game” to carry on in the fight despite such heavy adversity.<sup>240</sup>

The final stanza implores for both school boys and soldiers to “play up! And play the game!” The young boys hold on to this moral lesson throughout their life and pass it on as adults to successive generations “like a torch in flame/and falling fling to the host behind.”<sup>241</sup> Thus, the role of the public school is to create the attitude within the school

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<sup>239</sup> Newbolt, 94.

<sup>240</sup> Newbolt.

<sup>241</sup> Ibid.

boys that they carry on as adults to carry on despite adversity in service to a cause greater than their own. Particularly, this greater cause is that of Empire.

Henry Newbolt by 1921 would author the “Newbolt Report” for the Labour Government in which he argued that students should be exposed to a “sentimental, productive, attachment to the status quo” in regards to English Literature<sup>242</sup>. In Newbolt’s *Vita Lampada* that status quo was attached to the notion of war as a romantic extension of field sport. The Empire is a big school full of non-white peoples waiting to be educated so that one day they might grow up into English gentlemen.

This paternalistic attitude can be seen in W.T. Stead’s interview with Charles Gordon. Gordon explains that he “had taught the natives that they had a right to exist,” ignoring that a religious uprising against foreign rulers might suggest their conception of their own “right to exist” might be independent of Gordon- despite his own high praise of himself.<sup>243</sup> The basic assumption made in both cases was part of the larger rhetoric of benevolence. The idea that colonization was inherently good to colonized people. For example, the liberal Charles Wentworth Dilke on India stated that:

The two principles upon which our administration of this country might be based have long since been weighed against each other by the English people, who, rejecting the principle of a holding of India for the acquisition of prestige

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<sup>242</sup> Holt, 232.

<sup>243</sup> Stead, “Chinese Gordon on the Soudan,” *Pall Mall Gazette*, Jan. 9, 1884.



and trade, have decided that we are to govern India in the interests of the people of Hindostan.<sup>244</sup>

If the public school was the paternalistic environment that created future Britons, then the governed colonies themselves become the incubator for future Britons to rule themselves. But some, like Hilarie Belloc did not agree with this Big England approach, and longed for a smaller less imperial Britain not rooted in the hypocrisy of empire.

Hilarie Belloc

Hilaire Belloc's satirical narrative verse *The Modern Traveler* (1898) centers around the narrator Mr. Rooter. He is the only survivor of three associates who travel from the England to adventures in Africa. Though presenting themselves as explorers, they are in fact exploiters, speculators, and swindlers, and are given the self-explanatory names of Commander Sin and Captain Blood, by Belloc. Mr. Rooter recounts the exploits of his and his unfortunate comrades to an interviewer from *The Daily Menace*.

Belloc would go on to become a critic of Britain's Empire along with his fellow Catholic and Little Englander G.K. Chesterton. Here in his early career, Belloc is showing the critique of Empire that would define him in later years. In 1899, he made the distinction between colonization and empire. For Belloc, the white English man colonizing is different from creating an Empire. as colonies contribute and Empires are possessed which causes problems for the possessor.<sup>245</sup> Belloc undoubtedly was aware of

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<sup>244</sup> Charles Wentworth, *Greater Britain: A Record of Travel in English-speaking Countries, During 1866-7, Volume 2*, (London: MacMillan and Co., 1869), 369.

<sup>245</sup> Hilarie Belloc, *Essays on Liberalism*, (London: Cassel and Company, 1897), 151-152.

the large colonial struggles underway in Africa along with the travel narratives of Europeans into Africa with their exaggerations, and thus unreliable and self-congratulating narratives. Thus, *Modern Traveler* is not just a critique of British exploits in Africa, but also the romanticizing and self-aggrandizement surrounding popular and widely circulated narratives of the heroes of Empire, and Mr. Rooter is their stand in as an usurper of truth and honor.

Mr. Rooter's unreliable narrative begins quite suddenly with our protagonist with his interviewer from the *Daily Menace*:

“The Daily Menace, I presume? / Forgive the litter in the room.? I can't explain to you/ How out of place a man like me/ Would be without the things you see, -The Shields and Assegais [Spears] and odds And ends of little savage gods...”<sup>246</sup>

Almost immediately it becomes established that Rooter (who may have vague Dutch origins), Commander Sin, and Captain Blood are not in fact Englishmen, but are actually from obscure foreign origins. Sin and Blood are military and financial mercenaries respectively. Rooter presents Commander Sin as “Lazy, and something of a liar” who is “never known to pay.”<sup>247</sup> Captain Blood meanwhile is shown as being a financier whose

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<sup>246</sup> Hilarie Belloc, *The Modern Traveller*, (London: Edward Arnold, 1898), 5.

<sup>247</sup> Belloc, 7.

chief affairs “Were buying stocks and shelling shares.”<sup>248</sup> Thus, the adventures of the Empire abroad are being linked to foreignness and outside forces.

This line of argument was seen in the back bench promoters of “Tory Democracy” and “One Nation Conservatism.” Lord Randolph Churchill (father or Winston) opposed the liberal government’s policy in Egypt and the Sudan. He referred to the government’s protectorate of Egypt as a “bondholder’s occupation.”<sup>249</sup> The British were not in the Sudan for moral reasons, but instead were beholden to “Jewish stockholders” and international banking interests.<sup>250</sup> As a member of the Tory “Fourth Party,” Churchill had a vested interest in exposing Gladstone and the liberal government’s policy as hypocritical in regards to policies in Ireland.<sup>251</sup>

Writing in 1898, Belloc drew on the recent Battle of Omdurman and the use of the Maxim gun against the Mahdist in his famous axiom: “We have got the Maxim gun, and they have not.” During this battle ten thousand dervishes were killed with many more wounded. The British would see forty-eight dead and 434 wounded. The British Commander Major General Horatio Kitchener allegedly surveyed the resulting carnage

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<sup>248</sup> Ibid, 19.

<sup>249</sup> Lord Randolph Churchill, *Speeches of Lord Randolph Churchill: With a Sketch of His Life*, (London: G. Routledge, 1885), 40.

<sup>250</sup> Ibid, 42-43.

<sup>251</sup> Helen Merrel Lynd, *England in the Eighteen-Eighties: Toward a Social Basis for Freedom*, (New Brunswick: Transaction Press), 207-212.  
Gladstone was trying to pass Irish Home Rule, which the Tories were against.

and proclaimed that they had given the Mahdist “a good dusting.”<sup>252</sup> In *The Modern Traveler*, a mutiny has erupted from the native Africans the three “explores” hope to exploit. Mr. Rooter explains that Mr. Blood “knew the Native Mind” and that one had to “be firm but kind.” The gun is presented as a metaphor for the perceived supremacy of these whites over the natives. This supremacy is then reinforced quite literally with the phrase “Insisted upon...this position” is superimposed with an image the three being physically carried by natives.

#### 4.2 Recollections, Accounts, and Journals

Charles “Chinese” Gordon stood out as a national hero in Victorian Britain because of his qualities, achievements, and legacy. A major part of Gordon’s legacy is the sheer volume of personal accounts and correspondence he left behind. In 1881 a London firm published *Gordon in Central Africa, 1874-1879: from original letters and documents*. Three books authored by Gordon were published in 1884. *Reflections in Palestine: 1883*, *General Gordon's letters from the Crimea, the Danube and Armenia, August 16, 1884 to November 17, 1858*, and *Text of proclamation of General Gordon to the inhabitants of the Soudan* were all published in 1884 just prior to Gordon’s death in early 1885. Gordon’s friends and allies in Britain hurried to have these works published in order to further sway public opinion. The books supplemented continuing articles and updates on Gordon’s predicament at Khartoum published in *The Times*.

Several other works and collections of correspondence published after Gordon’s death

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<sup>252</sup> Spencer C. Tucker, *A Global Chronology of Conflict: From the Ancient World to the Modern Middle East, Volume I: ca. 300 BCE-1499 CE*, (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2010), 1510.

helped solidify public opinion of Gordon. *The journals of Major-Gen. C.G. Gordon, C.B., at Kartoum* and *General [Charles George] Gordon's private Diary of his exploits in China* published in 1885 further solidify Gordon's status as a national hero in the public view. In 1888 Gordon's sister also published a collection of letters from Gordon entitled: *Letters of general C.G. Gordon to his sister, M.A. Gordon*. In all Gordon's writings cover the span of his entire career. Gordon leaves his own account and personal account from his years as a junior officer in the Crimean War to his death during the fall of Khartoum.

The first scholarly work on Gordon came from Demetrius Charles de Kavanagh Boulger. Boulger's *The Life of Gordon*, stands out from other works on Gordon for several reasons. Boulger knew Gordon on a somewhat personal basis. Boulger actually asked Gordon's permission to write a biography in 1881 to which Gordon's "laughing reply was: "You know I shall never read it, but you can have all the papers now in the possession of my brother, Sir Henry Gordon".<sup>253</sup> Boulger functioned as editor of *General Gordon's Letters from the Crimea, The Danube and Armenia*, published in 1884. His introduction to the letters reflects his intent to rally the people and create public pressure to force Prime Minister Gladstone to relieve Gordon and end the siege at Khartoum. Boulger's contribution to Gordon's legacy is immeasurable. His connection to Gordon leaves scholars with a well focused survey of Gordon's life in spite of any

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<sup>253</sup> D. C. de Kavanagh Boulger, *The Life of Gordon*. (1896; repr., Elibron classics. [S.l.]: Elibron, Adamant Media Corp, 2007), v.

prejudices or preferences in the content of Boulger's work. Other scholars and writers of the had considerably less access to Gordon than Boulger.

In 1899, a young British officer named Winston Spencer Churchill published his own account of the war in the Sudan. The first edition was printed less than three years after the publication of Boulger's *The Life of Gordon*. Churchill's *The River War: An Account of the Reconquest of the Sudan* only discussed Gordon's role in the Sudan briefly. Churchill recognized that Gordon would have a lasting impact on British history. Churchill provides a very vivid and elaborate portrayal even going to the extent of noting the juxtaposition of two idealistic and religious leaders, Gordon and the Mahdi.<sup>254</sup> In Churchill's own words: "It is impossible to study any part of Charles Gordon's career without being drawn to all the rest."<sup>255</sup> He also portrays Gordon as a man "sustained by two great moral and mental stimulants: his honor as a man, his faith as a Christian."<sup>256</sup> The British people of the Victorian era claimed Gordon as a hero and a martyr.

Historian Lytton Strachey considered Gordon to be one of the most distinguished people of the Victorian era. The section on Gordon in Strachey's *Eminent Victorians* has long been one of the standard scholarly works on Gordon. The book first published in 1918 makes it one of the first accounts written long enough after the fall of Khartoum to cut through some of the myth, legend and propaganda surrounding Gordon's life.

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<sup>254</sup>Winston Churchill, *The River War: An Account of the Reconquest of the Sudan*, 13.

<sup>255</sup>Ibid.

<sup>256</sup> Ibid.

Strachey's account like so many others portrays Gordon as an honorable man and a devout Christian. But, the biggest propagandizer of Gordon, was Gordon.

In *The Journals of Major-Gen. C. G. Gordon, C. B., at Khartoum*, Gordon is first and foremost interested in protecting himself and his position in Khartoum and preemptively push back against criticism from Gladstone and the Liberal party. Gordon had to remind the reader that Britain's options in the Sudan were limited. To this end, he warned that a complete British withdrawal from the region would force those Sudanese opposed to the Mahdi to become his supporters:

Of course the moment it is known we are going to evacuate, we drive all neutrals, and even friendlies of the country into the arms of the Mahdi, for they will calculate "We are going to be left, and consequently we must, for our own interests, do something for the Mahdi, in order to hedge our position." This means that arrayed against our evacuation will be the mass of those living in our midst, and who are now with us.<sup>257</sup>

On September 17, he warned of the danger of the spread of the Mahdist movement to other Islamic populations:

[I]f the Mahdi takes Khartoum (which will entail the fall of every town in Soudan) it will need a large force to stay his propaganda. According to the Greek [Consul] he meditates an invasion of Egypt and Palestine, where they are all ready to rise. It cannot be too strongly impressed on the public that it is not the Mahdi's forces which are to be feared, but the rising of the populations by his emissaries.<sup>258</sup>

According to Gordon, Britain did not have the luxury of abandoning the Sudan to its fate, as the Mahdi's continued success would threaten the British position in Egypt and incite political unrest among Islamic populations from Turkey to India. With outright abandonment inadvisable, what options did Britain have left? Gordon emphasized that

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<sup>257</sup> Charles George Gordon, *The Journals of Major-Gen. C. G. Gordon, C. B., at Khartoum, Book I*, (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trubner and Co., 1898), 32 3.

<sup>258</sup> Ibid, 30-1.

any proposal of options on his part had been constrained by an imperial morality based on economic frugality and territorial retrenchment:

In discussing this question I have entirely put my own peculiar views out of the question: to give up countries which are to some degree civilized, which, if properly governed, are quiet and orderly . . . and to allow of the slave trade to flourish again in tenfold intensity, is not a very high role, but *quoi faire?* We have not the men to govern these lands, we cannot afford the money; consequently, I advise what I have said.<sup>259</sup>

The sense of ironic resignation inherent in this entry is apparent. Although civilized to a degree and amenable to proper government, the Sudan was nevertheless to be sacrificed to the depredations of the Mahdi and an unchecked slave trade in the name of a British withdrawal mandated by budgetary restraint. On the other hand, complete withdrawal would entail a threat to British interests throughout the Islamic world by a triumphant Mahdism. Consequently, Gordon reasoned that if the morality of economic frugality and imperial retrenchment was to continue to hold sway over imperial policy, the employment of immoral means was unavoidable. On this point Gordon wrote:

I am only discussing how to get out of it [the Sudan] in honour and in the cheapest way ...and that way is, either by some sort of provisional government under Zubair, or by giving it to the Turks; it is simply a question of GETTING OUT OF IT with decency.<sup>260</sup>

Of the two surrogates mentioned by Gordon, the use of Turkey as direct administrator of the Sudan seemed the most obvious to Gordon. Nominally, Egypt itself was still part of the Ottoman Empire; as a province of Egypt, the Sudan was the property of the Empire as well. To be sure, the Turks would require a stipend for taking over the administration of the province. Even so, the payment of a stipend would be more

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<sup>259</sup> Charles George Gordon, *The Journals of Major-Gen. C. G. Gordon, C. B., at Khartoum*, Book V (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trubner and Co., 1898), 169.

<sup>260</sup> Gordon, 168-9.



economical than the cost of a permanent British occupation. On receiving this proposal, Gladstone promptly rejected it.

Still, Gordon continued to defend this recommendation in the Journals as satisfying the moral imperative of economic frugality and retrenchment. On September 15, he wrote:

[T]here is the terrible outlay of money (which has to be met) for current expenses. Also who is to govern the country? All idea of evacuation en masse must be given up, it is totally impossible, and the only solution is to let the Turks come in.<sup>261</sup>

He repeated the same argument in his entry for October 5:

If you do not arrange with the Turks you will not get out of the country for a year, and it will cost you twelve millions, and probably then you will have to fall back on the Turks. Whereas if you arrange with the Turks you can get out in January, and it will cost you seven millions, including the two millions you give the Turks.<sup>262</sup>

Gordon was certainly aware of Gladstone's previous declaration during the Midlothian campaign that the Turks were "upon the whole, since the black day when they first entered Europe, the one great anti-human species of humanity" and possibly anticipated the rejection of this proposal.<sup>263</sup> Rhetorically, however, the recommendation suited perfectly his purpose of demonstrating the incompatibility of Gladstone's principles with an authentic imperial morality. The same can be said of his proposal to employ Zubair Pasha, a notorious slave trader under house arrest in Cairo, as surrogate ruler of the Sudan. Like his proposal to employ the Turks, this suggestion was rejected out of hand by the Foreign Office.

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<sup>261</sup> Charles's George Gordon, *The Journals of Major-Gen. C. G. Gordon, C. B., at Khartoum, Book I*, (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trubner and Co., 1898), 25.

<sup>262</sup> Gordon, 25.

<sup>263</sup> Philip Magnus, *Gladstone: A Biography*, (New York: E.P. Dutton and Co.; Inc, 1964), 242.

Once again, Gordon defended this proposal in the Journals on the grounds that its formulation was in accordance to Gladstone's demand for a cheap solution that did not involve British responsibility. He fully admitted that such a proposal could destroy the credibility he had established with the humanitarian interest groups. Even so, he presented Zubair to his superiors as the lesser of two evils. On September 19, he recorded the following entry:

I expect that my asking for Zubair to come up was the last drop in the cup, and henceforth I was a complete pariah, yet, in reality, if the Soudan [sic] was to be abandoned, what difference could it possibly make whether Zubair or the Mahdi carried on slave hunting, for, according to all accounts, the Mahdi is most active in this direction.<sup>264</sup>

In his entry for November 8, he expanded upon the advantages of using Zubair:

It must be obvious that if Zubair was . . . installed as Governor-General, with a semi-independent position and a subsidy . . . and your temporary presence, he would rally around him a huge following, who are now disgusted with the Mahdi and his dervishes, but who will be obliged to hold to him, because you evacuate; even those people with us, we perforce oblige to join the Mahdi. . . . As for the slave trade, the Mahdi will be ten times worse than Zubair, and you could make the payment of the subsidy (to Zubair) contingent on his not doing it on any vast scale. The Zubair solution is the sort of half-way house between rapid retreat and continued occupation, either by the Turks or yourself. The Mahdi could never get the people to rise against Zubair; it will be only because they are presented with no rallying point, and perforce they will join him if you leave. They would never have joined the Mahdi if Zubair had come up.<sup>265</sup>

As the above quotations demonstrate, Gordon employed a strategy of conditional reasoning (if . . . then) to reveal the underlying grotesqueness of Gladstone's imperial morality. If you would save money, then you must install the Turks as rulers of the Sudan. If you would minimize British involvement in the region and still quell the spread of Mahdism, then you must appoint as Governor-General one who is more ruthless than the Mahdi, in this case a slave trader. Following Gladstone's imperial morality to its logical

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<sup>264</sup> Gordon, Journals, Book I, 37-8.

<sup>265</sup> Gordon, Journals, Book VI, 211.

ends in the Sudan would entail the establishment and support of Turkish despotism as a counter to the indigenous despotism of the Mahdi. Alternatively, the reestablishment of the slave trade on a smaller scale under the control of Zubair (with British support) would be undertaken to prevent slave trading on a much wider scale under the Mahdi. In this manner, Gordon not only defended his proposals as reasonable under the circumstances but also implied a vision of the absurd reality such a hybridization of incompatible elements would produce.

What, then, did Gordon believe to be the ultimate solution to the Sudanese crisis? Throughout the Journals, he repeatedly stated his aversion to a British occupation of the Sudan. However, I would argue that his justification for remaining in Khartoum ironically subverts this position and ultimately privileges a British assumption of responsibility. In this case, the argument Gordon employed was not the product of his own rhetorical invention but was an outgrowth of British expansion itself. In order to appreciate Gordon's application of this expansionistic reasoning, a brief explanation of the expansionism upon which it is based is necessary.

The assumption of imperial control over a state or territory was often preceded by the formal or informal establishment of a British alliance with one of the tribal/ ethnic/ religious groups within the area in question. In many instances, such a group actually sought an alliance with Britain as a means of protection from rival groups. The inevitable outcome of the arrangement was the military subjugation of the rival groups, the

imposition of imperial authority, and the elevation of the British allies to a position of favored status.<sup>266</sup>

This process of expansion facilitated the rhetorical invention of imperial rhetors by providing a powerful emotional and ethical justification for the extension and/or maintenance of empire in areas torn by social conflict. Sudanese culture in the early 1880s was divided along religious lines. The more orthodox Islamic upper classes resisted the Mahdi's claims of religious authority while the lower classes supported his calls for the purification of Islam through the expulsion of the hated Egyptians. While the Islamic orthodoxy hailed Gordon's appointment as Governor-General and accorded him a hero's welcome on his arrival in Khartoum, the Mahdists regarded him as an example of British interference and called for the extermination of those Sudanese who supported him.<sup>267</sup> Thus for Gordon, the essential underlying "truth" of the nature of British involvement in the Sudan was the moral imperative to honor the trust placed in the British by their Sudanese allies. Although the British government wished to abandon the Sudanese people to the Mahdi, Gordon could not allow himself to desert those who trusted him. In this manner, the reader's sense of shame and guilt was evoked in order to justify the assumption of imperial responsibility for the Sudan.

This appeal was especially evident in Gordon's entries for September 29 and November 9. On September 29, Gordon wrote:

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<sup>266</sup> David Spurr, *The Rhetoric of Empire: Colonial Discourse in Journalism, Travel Writing, and Imperial Administration*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993), 5 -6.

<sup>267</sup> Ibid.

I do not dictate, but I say what every gentleman in Her Majesty's Army would agree to\*that it would be mean . . . to leave men who (though they may not come up to our ideas as heroes) have stuck to me, though a Christian dog in their eyes, through great difficulties, and thus force them to surrender to those who have not conquered them and to do that at the bidding of a foreign Power, to save one's own skin.<sup>268</sup>

As the siege wore on, Gordon became even more defiant in his resolve to remain in Khartoum. In the entry for November 9, he imagined the following argument asserted against his abandonment of Khartoum by the Sudanese who trusted in him for their deliverance:

The people here would reason thus, if I attempted to leave: "You came up here, and had you not come, we should have some of us got away to Cairo, but we trusted in you to extricate us; we suffered and are suffering great privations, in order to hold the town. Had you not come we should have given in at once and obtained pardon; now we can, after our obstinate defence, expect no mercy from the Mahdi, who will avenge on us all the blood which has been spilt around Khartoum. You have taken our money and promised to repay us; all this goes for naught if you quit us; it is your bounden duty to stay by us, and to share our fate; if the British Government deserts us that is no reason for you to do so, after our having stood by you." I declare positively, and once for all, that I will not leave the Soudan [sic] until every one who wants to go down [i.e., escape to Egypt] is given the chance to do so, unless a government is established, which relieves me of the charge; therefore if any emissary by letter comes up here ordering me to come down, I WILL NOT OBEY IT, BUT WILL STAY HERE, AND FALL WITH THE TOWN, AND RUN ALL RISKS.<sup>269</sup>

Although born of an impersonal process of imperial expansion, such an appeal to guilt could not fail to affect readers. However, it was not just sentimentality that perked the interest of the readership back home. Trophies and the exoticism of the Sudan fascinated as well.

#### 4.3 Material Culture

Egypt and its material culture fascinated Europeans throughout the nineteenth century. The journals of soldiers in the Sudan give a glimpse of the material culture from the Stand that they would disseminate to the readers at home. Alfred Milner, until 1892

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<sup>268</sup> Gordon, Journals, Book II, 78-9.

<sup>269</sup> Gordon, Journals, Book VI, 215-6.

the Under-Secretary for Finance in Egypt, criticized the way the Great Powers appropriated Egypt's material and cultural wealth. His 1893 *England in Egypt*, begins:

More than two thousand years ago, [Herodotus] the Father of History, in his comprehensive survey of the then known world, singled out Egypt as pre-eminently the land of wonders. 'I speak at length about Egypt,' he says, 'because it contains more marvelous things than any other country, things too strange for words.'<sup>270</sup>

Milner's book is an account of reform spanning politics, economics, defense, international diplomacy, and more. But it is also a book about 'things': his Egypt remains a land with a compelling material culture.<sup>271</sup>

Milner's thesis was that modern, reformed Egypt must never again be regarded as a resource ripe for appropriation. Yet British servicemen had been doing just that since 1882. The 1898 operation to recapture Khartoum was the culminating phase of a protracted campaign against the jihadist forces of the *Mahdīa*, an insurrection against Ottoman rule instigated in 1881 by Sufi scholar and self-proclaimed *Mahdi*, Muhammad Ahmad. The events that unfolded over 17 years, not least the death of General Charles Gordon in Khartoum in January 1885, ensured that developments on the extreme periphery of the Anglo-Egyptian sphere of influence remained topical in Britain.

Looting was popular with soldiers to most western armies during the nineteenth century.<sup>272</sup> But, it can also be viewed as part of a larger Western "moral vision" that

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<sup>270</sup> Alfred Milner, *England in Egypt*, (London: Edward Arnold, 1893), 1-2.

<sup>271</sup> Ibid, 1.

<sup>272</sup> Raffi Gregorian, "Unfit for Service: British Law and Looting in India in the Mid-Nineteenth Century," *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, 13 (1990), 84.

allowed for looting as part of the view of superiority due to race, class, and history.<sup>273</sup>

Evidence of looting in the Sudan includes a sheet of notepaper listing the spears and Qu'rans assigned to staff officers returning from the 1884-85 Nile Expedition. And a letter written to Reginald Wingate, then commanding the military intelligence operation out of the advanced headquarters at Wadi Halfa, by an officer returned from the campaign:

[...] Can you tell me what has become of the [Battle of]Firket trophies [collected?] at Halfa. My name was put on several things that I wished to buy and it has occurred to me that the value of the stores which I left at Halfa with Neqhib Effendi for Smyth to take over for your mess might go towards the purchase of the trophies. If this will do please give instructions for them to be sent to me here, & let me know the balance I owe you. [...] Mortimer will send them to me if handed over to him, but if not well packed they are liable—as you know—to be looted. [...] Can you & Slatin spare me a photo? I would like Slatin in Dervish dress if he has any left.<sup>274</sup>

Take for example, the portrait of Rudolph Slatin, escaped from sixteen years in captivity in Omdurman in 1895. His status as one of the few Europeans to have witnessed events in the Mahdist Sudan is reflected in his decision to be photographed in Dervish clothing, epitomized by the jibba, or patched cotton shirt, that signified the piety of the wearer, and his allegiance to the Mahdi. Everything worn and carried by Slatin in his photographic portrait had been recovered by Anglo-Egyptian soldiers from recent battlefields. In another photograph of three officers of the Grenadier Guards, Lieutenant Filmer, on the left, sits behind a Dervish animal hide shield recovered from the Omdurman battlefield. It is neither privileged in the photograph, nor concealed, testifying to a relaxed, quotidian attitude to looting.

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<sup>273</sup> Richard Davis, 'Three Styles in Looting India', *History and Anthropology*, 6 (1994),311.

<sup>274</sup>Richard Davis, 6.

The acquisition of spoils was manifestly regarded as a legitimate practice in which all ranks actively indulged. Despoliation provides a way to think about the Anglo-Egyptian counter-insurgency campaign as a continuous series of cross-cultural encounters: with Egyptian military allies; with local peoples; with the natural world and the built environment; and with the enemy. Looting and trophy taking influenced how Egypt and the Sudan were perceived and understood in Britain—and how Britons perceived and understood themselves.

In late 1883 British troops encountered Hadendowa tribesmen and their allies under Osman Digna for the first time, and it came as a shock. Digna's troops attacked aggressively and with tactical dexterity, punishing Anglo-Egyptian mistakes, despite their lack of modern weapons. Everything Dervish men carried into battle—from war drums to prayer beads—was avidly collected. But looting and trophy taking was a facet of Sudanese tribal cultures too.

Rudolf Carl von Slatin's autobiographical account of his duties as the Egyptian Governor of Dara in southwest Darfur in 1881 sets out what participants in inter-tribal conflicts regarded as suitable for appropriation, including women and children, crops and flocks, and weapons and equipment. Their capture from, and denial to, their adversaries was as symbolic as it was instrumental.

Slatin was just one of many colonial administrators who learned on the job how local leaders manipulated cross-cultural regimes of value to their political advantage.<sup>275</sup>

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<sup>275</sup> Fred R. Myers, *The Empire of Things: Regimes of Value and Material Culture*, (Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 2001).



He recounts village Sheikh Muslem Wad Kabbashi's conditional appreciation of Charles Gordon, whom he remembered for his bravery in battle, but also for the way that:

when he [Gordon] divided the spoil, no one was forgotten, and he kept nothing for himself. He was very tender-hearted about women and children, and never allowed them to be distributed, as is our custom in war; [...] One day, continued the Sheikh, "without letting him know, we put some women aside, but if he had found us out, we should have had a bad time of it".<sup>276</sup>

Notions of authority and ownership are fundamental to determining "'dense' sociocultural meaning and value" assigned to objects that make up a society's material culture.<sup>277</sup> Slatin's memoir, translated and edited by Wingate in pursuit of impression management in Britain, is tendentious. But it nevertheless suggests how displays of authority and ownership were fundamental to the way Kabbashi, Gordon, Slatin, and others too, sustained their political legitimacy and social prestige. Each of them rehearsed what they regarded as their implicitly superior values and beliefs by determining how the spoils of war should be treated.

What sets armed conflict apart in the context of the relationship between an object's value and the manner of its acquisition, is the notion that what is at stake is the worth assigned not to objects produced *in* a given society, but acquired *by* it by force. The most extreme example of the relationship between the display of authority and the violent acquisitive act is beheading, and the subsequent display of body parts as the ultimate war trophy.

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<sup>276</sup> Rudolf Carl von Slatin, *Fire and Sword in the Sudan: A Personal Narrative of Fighting and Serving the Dervishes*, (London: Edward Arnold, 1935), 21.

<sup>277</sup> Annette Weiner, *Two Worlds of Cotton: Colonialism and the Regional Economy in the French Soudan, 1800-1946*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press), 5.

The unlikely subject of this wood engraving for the front page of the 17 May 1884 edition of the *Graphic*, is beheading. Victoria is depicted inspecting a flag recently captured during combat operations along Sudan's Red Sea littoral. In Sudanese, Egyptian, and British culture, flags were regarded as significant military artifacts.

In his account of the 1884 Nile Expedition Colonel William Butler describes how he moved to secure a Dervish flag when his advance guard overran a hastily abandoned campsite:

At the further side of the level ground stood a group of eight or ten Dervish standards of many colours.... In the khor, by the river, about a hundred donkeys and a few camels were standing or lying around.

[...]

I sent my staff-officer back at once to carry the General the largest and best of the standards, and...we began to collect the captured animals.<sup>278</sup>

In *A Trophy from the Soudan*, the Queen reaches out to hold the enemy flag. The moral behind the image is located in the dance of acquisition Butler describes, and Victoria's grasp completes: from Dervish commander's standard bearer, to British soldier, to monarch. But in that moment this meaning was illusory: the recent campaign to check Osman Digna had failed to secure its political objectives: far from losing his head, Digna consolidated his control of the Eastern Sudan.

Unfortunately for Britain and Egypt, it was Charles Gordon who lost his head, when Khartoum fell. The disaster was sensationalized by survivors' testimony, not least when appropriated by Wingate in pursuit of his own agenda concerning the reconquest

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<sup>278</sup> Sir W. F. Butler, *The Campaign of the Cataracts: Being a Personal Narrative of the Great Nile Expedition of, with Illustrations from Drawings by Lady Butler: Also a Map of the Nile from the Mediterranean to the Equatorial Lakes*, (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle, and Rivington, 1887), 339.

of the Sudan: a national hero had died violently, and the head had been hacked from his corpse.<sup>15</sup> Ensuing calls for retribution testify to the density of the sociocultural meaning assigned to this event in Britain.

Reginald Wingate received this letter in April 1885:

[...] my last letter was only as far as I recollect to urge you to not let anyone be in front of you in regard to recovering the head at least of Gordon - I feel that I can be confident that that will be your share of the work. [...]<sup>279</sup>

When Wingate eventually managed to facilitate Slatin's escape, the former prisoner's testimony (edited by Wingate) added to the longed-for eyewitness testimony used to authenticate subsequent public accounts of events surrounding Gordon's death, including Robert Kelly's art works commissioned for Slatin's book:

I crawled out of my tent. ... In front, marched three Black soldiers; one named Shatta... carried in his hands a bloody cloth in which something was wrapped up, and behind him followed a crowd of people weeping. ... Shatta undid the cloth and showed me the head of General Gordon! [...] I gazed silently at this ghastly spectacle. His blue eyes were half-opened; the mouth was perfectly natural; the hair of his head, and his short whiskers, were almost quite white.<sup>280</sup>

In the Sudan, Muhammad Ahmad's prestige soared. Gordon's head was displayed in Omdurman, where it signified the moral supremacy of the *Mahdīa*. Britain suffered a loss of prestige in inverse proportion. Gordon's head remained painfully on display in Britain, too: Kelly does not hold back when he presents it to Slatin's reader, for example: there it is, for us to look at—and look at it we must.

If the expedition to rescue Gordon had been a military failure (too little, too late, and at great cost in blood and treasure), the consequent ceding of the Sudan to the

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<sup>279</sup> Douglas Johnson, 'The Death of Gordon: A Victorian Myth', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 10 (1982), 288.

<sup>280</sup> von Slatin, 206.

insurrection was a political disaster. Public support for reconquest was motivated by the perceived need to recover personal, institutional, and national honor. The taking of trophies and their display would prove fundamental to narrative accounts of a job well done and moral order re-established.

#### 4.4 Conclusion

The continued presence in print culture of the Sudan and the events that unfolded there in 1885 was a testament to how strongly the consuming public connected with this romantic adventure. Kipling and Newbolt used the Sudan Campaign to frame larger issues of empire and the role of the British man in maintaining the existing order, thus reinforcing a Big England view of empire. Belloc, however, as a staunch Little Englander used satire as framing device to attack the romantic adventure in Africa, but also exposing the bigotry behind the opposition to empire.

The popularity and continued hero worship of Charles Gordon was in part fueled by his own hand in his journals from Khartoum. Gordon was keen on presenting his side of the story, creating a tragic hero abandoned by his Prime Minister in London. However, heroics in the Sudan came from journals, memoirs, and artifacts brought back by soldiers. This material fed into the imperial politics of power, thus, the conquering British after exacting revenge for Gordon in 1898, were able to present their subjugation of Sudan by absconding with cultural material. Thus, the Sudan Campaign became representative of the larger colonial project of subjection through its representation in the wider media landscape.

## CHAPTER 5. CONCLUSION

The events at Khartoum and the subsequent Sudan Campaign were part of the larger Imperial project and spheres of influence in Africa. But the Empire did not just exist in the periphery, it also affected the everyday life of Britons back in the home nation. The economic engine of the Empire produced goods made possible by the resources of the Empire. In turn, advertisements then sold these goods with the exploits and spoils of Imperial adventures. These adventurers were in turn made the heroes of literature. Journalists as special correspondents made themselves heroes in their dispatches from the periphery. Politicians then sanctioned these exploits by adding new colonies and “protectorates” into the fold.

In looking at the discourse in the press surrounding the Sudan Campaign, we have seen that the issues of empire were interwoven in the public discourse and were not just confined to Westminster and elite smoking rooms. The public engaged them in the pages of newspapers, and in the printed literature and memoirs. The public could influence and be engaged with policy through the press. Literature reflected the debates surrounding Britain's imperial role, and journals and memoirs romanticized and actively promoted the physical and metaphorical plunder of the Sudan.

The newspapers and literature, and by extension the reading public, were consistently attentive to imperial matters. Specifically, in matters concerning the Empire in Africa, there was robust commentary about Britain's actions in Egypt and the Sudan across the political spectrum. Throughout these events, Conservative, Liberal, and

Radical voices spoke of the need to defend the nation's prestige and not to lose face in the eyes of its Continental rivals. British prestige involved a myriad of principles associated with classical liberalism, security, and economic and diplomatic supremacy.

For the imperialists, the perpetuation of these elements often necessitated a vigorous foreign and imperial policy. In the 1880s, the need to uphold British prestige was at the heart of intervention in the Sudan, the public's perception surrounding Gordon's mission to Khartoum and the public's demands for his relief. Equally concerned about the nation's standing, Liberal leaders and their press allies frequently opposed imperial interventionism on the grounds that it was detrimental to British prestige, as it proved to be an unnecessary distraction to the government, diverted resources, and pulled Britain away from its principled abhorrence of war, conflict, conquest, and subjugation.

Throughout these events, Conservative and some Liberal voices spoke of the need to defend the nation's prestige and not to lose face in the eyes of its Continental rivals. British prestige involved a myriad of principles associated with classical liberalism, security, and economic and diplomatic supremacy. The role of the media within this political milieu cannot be discounted. The omnipresent presence of the media in political discourse today can be traced back to the nineteenth century journalism. Editorializing and activist journalism predates our present criticism of biased and partisan journalism. The media, through the press and literature, became influential in the everyday private lives of the consuming public through the promotion of public

opinion. Thus, the Sudan Campaign's representation in print culture can be seen a modern war, sold to the larger public for the auspices of political actors.

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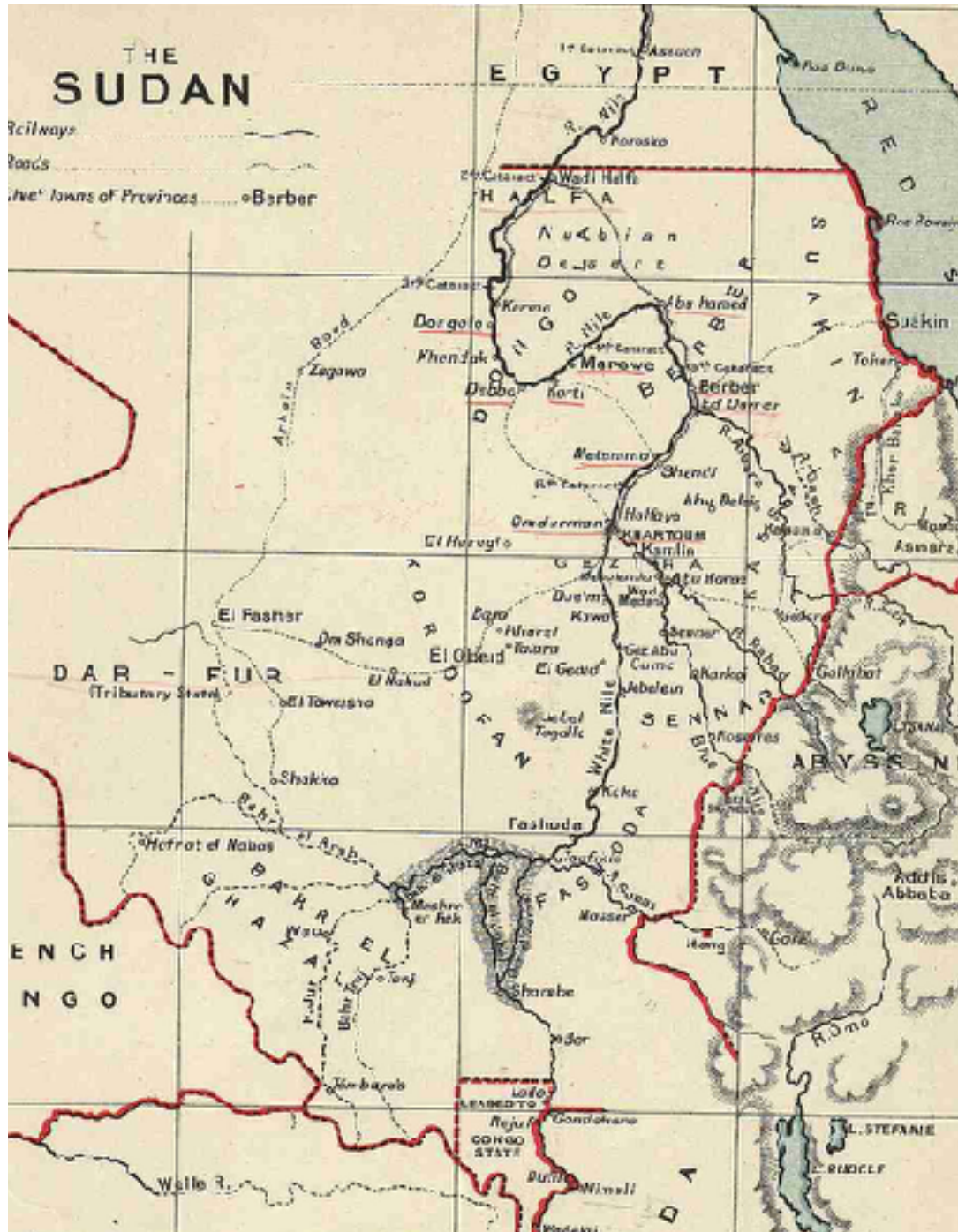
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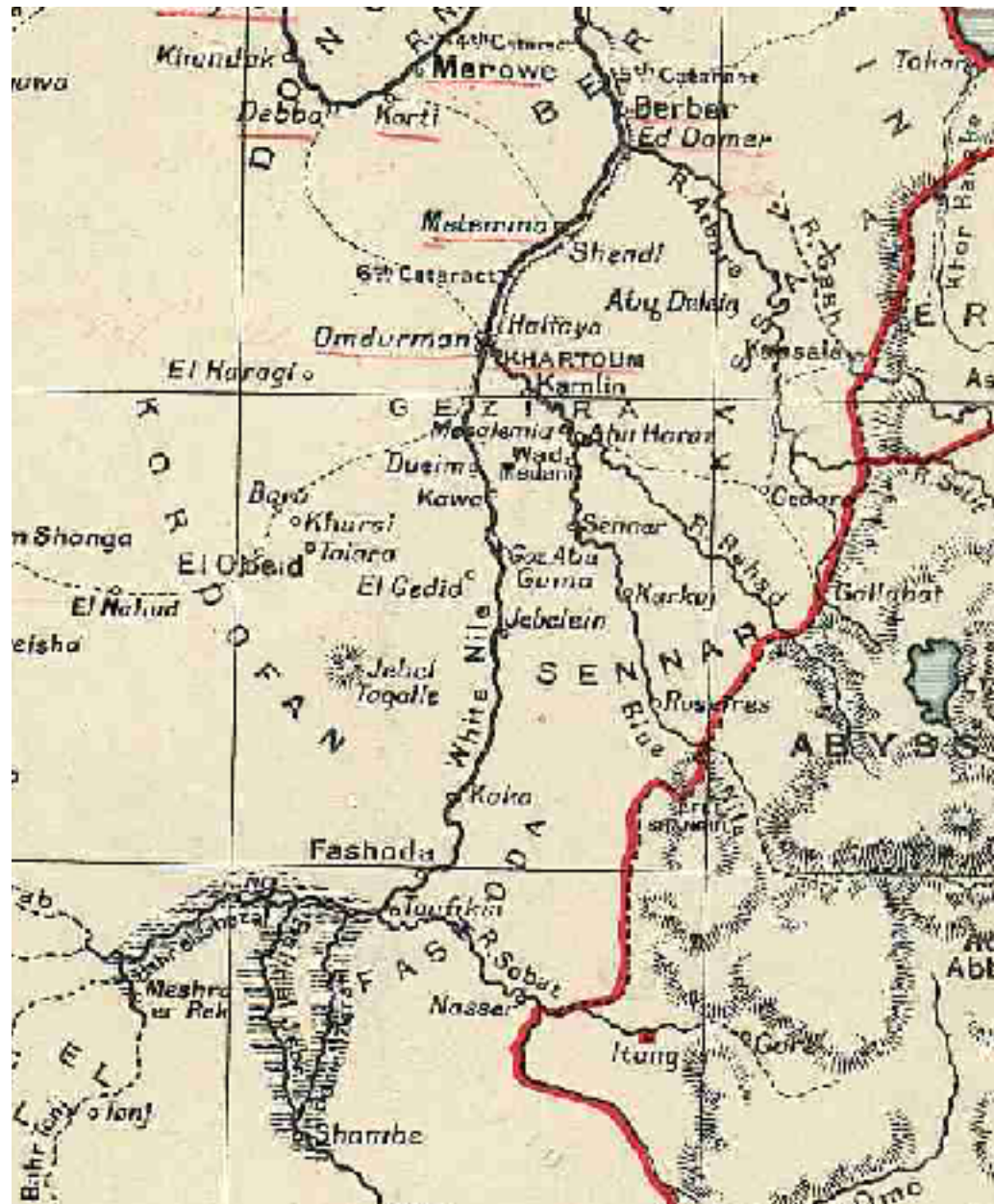
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## APPENDICES

### A. MAPS



Map 1: "The Anglo-Egyptian Sudan" from H.W. Mardon, "Memory Map Atlas, specially prepared for use in Egyptian schools", George Philip & Son Ltd., The London Geographical Institute, 1903.



Map 2. Close up of the Khartoum and Omdurman region of Northern Sudan.

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*Dundee Courier*

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